A

TREATISE

OF THE

Causes of Incredulity.

Wherein are examin'd the general Motives and Occasions which dispose Unbelievers to reject the Christian Religion.

WITH

Two LETTERS, containing a direct Proof of the Truth of Christianity.

Translated from the French of Monsieur LE CLERC.

LONDON,
Printed for *Awnsham* and *John Churchill*, at the Black Swan in *Pater-noster-row*.
MDCXCVII.

XUM

The Translator's PREFACE.

MR. Le Clerc *is a Person so well known to all the learned World, that it could not be thought less arrogant than superfluous for me to give any Character of his Capacity or his Writings. Nor can it be said that I transgress either way in recommending the following Treatise; for, setting aside all personal Considerations, the Subject of it is enough to justify my Undertaking. The Study of Religion in general is so natural to Man, that some would make this Inclination to pass for the only essential Distinction of our Species from all other Animals. But the Study of the true Religion must needs be of the highest Importance, since the Profession of it is not acknowledg'd to be more necessary, than the Sects pretending themselves to be the only Persons enjoying that Happiness, are found to be different from one another in their Opinions and Practices. This Diversity join'd to the great number of Parties that lay their Claim to genuine Christianity exclusively of all the rest, seems to render the Discovery of the Truth very difficult, if not impossible; And indeed thousands of well-meaning People have upon this very account given up themselves to Scepticism and Indifference in Matters of Religion; or, which is as bad, are content to be implicitely led by their Teachers. Now that Person deserves best of the World who not only makes the Truth plain and intelligible, separating it from all the false Notions with which it is so mix'd and over-run sometimes as to endanger the entire Ruin thereof; but who likewise establishes such an excellent Method*

that a Man may be most certain he's on the right side, without being oblig'd to undergo the endless Labour of examining every Religion successively. How far our Author has contributed to do Mankind this desirable piece of Service, the Reader must determine; for we pretend not to lead his Judgment. And tho Mr. Le Clerc *is so modest as to think his own Performance inferiour to that of* Grotius *upon the same Subject, I must affirm, (and that with all imaginable Impartiality) that in my Opinion there is no Comparison to be made between them; for were it for nothing else but that the Evidence of Mr.* Le Clerc's *Reasons is obvious to Men of all Conditions, whereas most of the other's Book is not intelligible but to profound Scholars, (as if these only had a Right to the Privilege of understanding the Grounds of their Religion) this alone is sufficient to decide the Controversy. But what is more, notwithstanding the extraordinary Talents of* Grotius, *he was not near so great a Master of the Oriental Languages, nor so acute and solid a Philosopher; nor yet superior in Philology or History; to speak nothing of the Advantages of writing after him. But let Mr.* Le Clerc's *Book speak for its Author. As for my Version, I shan't detain the Reader with any Apology, because it is not more correct or polite, if it be faithful and intelligible, which is all that is necessary for those who sincerely study for Truth: and if I be so happy as to satisfy them, I care not much for the Displeasure of others.*

To

To the READER.

'TIS some Years since I first form'd a Design of writing upon the Subject of this small Piece, which I publish at present; and had my other Occupations purely depended upon my own Choice, this had been perform'd long ago: but being necessarily engag'd in some other things, I was forc'd to put it off till now. At length having finish'd my Latin Writings upon the Pentateuch, I happily became Master of Time enough to turn my Applications upon this Subject. I can freely say, that I never thought of Matters of this nature without extreme Satisfaction; for, after what manner soever I could consider the Christian Religion, it always appear'd to me grounded upon the firmest Proofs, and the Doctrines of it perfectly conformable to sound Reason, or (to say all in one word) worthy the Creator of Heaven and Earth. Nor did I in my whole Life labour with more ardour and delight than I did in composing this Work, wherein I have,

I think, evidently made out that Unbelievers act againſt all good Senſe in refuſing their Aſſent to the Goſpel: and I perſwade my ſelf, that if they conſider the ſame things that I have, they muſt neceſſarily acknowledg the Truth of it. But whether I'm miſtaken or not, that the World ſhall judg. If this Book have the good luck to meet with that Reception in French, which ſeveral others of this kind have had, I may one time or other put it into Latin; and in my Annotations upon it confirm all that I ſay by the Authority of the moſt antient Apologiſts of Chriſtianity, and that too of the moſt conſidering Heathens; as the incomparable *Grotius* has done in his Books of the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion. I'm far indeed from equalling my Work to his, nor do I flatter my ſelf with the ſame Succeſs, as to the Judgment of the publick: but if Men had regard only to the Intentions of thoſe that write, I think I may ſafely ſay that none in the World had better than mine, nor was more convinc'd of the Goodneſs of that Cauſe I have undertaken to defend.

John Le Clerc.

The CONTENTS of the Chapters.

THE Preface, or the Design of the Author in this Work. pag. 1.

Part I. *Of the Motives of Incredulity which spring from the inward Disposition or Inclinations of Unbelievers.*

Chap. 1. *That it is unreasonable and unjust to reject the Christian Religion, because it is contrary to the Dispositions a Man finds in himself.* p. 9.

Chap. 2. *That Pride may be the Cause why Assent is refus'd to the Proofs of the Truth of the Christian Religion.* p. 27.

Chap. 3. *That what hinders Unbelievers from yielding to the Proofs of Christianity partly consists, perhaps in mere Prejudices, which all the while may be false.* p. 45.

Chap. 4. *That many are Unbelievers, only because they know not how to reason well.* p. 63.

Chap. 5. *That the Neglect of searching into Truth is often the Cause of Incredulity.* p. 75.

Chap. 6. *That Laziness keeps many People in Ignorance, Doubts and Infidelity.* p. 93.

The Conclusion of the first Part. p. 107.

Part II. *Of the Motives of Incredulity which proceed from the Occasions given Unbelievers to doubt of the Christian Religion, or entirely to reject it.*

Chap. 1. *That the Truth of the Christian Religion ought not to be call'd in doubt, because several embrace it more out of Credulity than upon good Reasons.* p. 110.

Chap. 2. *That the Immorality or Ignorance of those who sometimes express the greatest Zeal for*

for Religion, ſhould not juſtly render it ſuſpected to Unbelievers. p. 131.

Chap. 3. *That the Incredulous are in the wrong for rejecting the Chriſtian Religion, becauſe Intereſt ſeems to be the main Cauſe of many Peoples Devotion.* p. 143.

Chap. 4. *That the Diviſions which reign among Chriſtians, is no good Reaſon why the Chriſtian Religion ſhould not be true.* p. 165.

Chap. 5. *That the Incredulous object in vain, that Chriſtianity being ſo little known, and ſo ill obſerv'd in the World as it is, can't be ſo uſeful to Mankind as a Religion reveal'd from Heaven for the Good of all Men ſhould be.* p. 180.

Chap. 6. *That Unbelievers can't conclude the Chriſtian Religion to be falſe, becauſe the Divines of their Acquaintance make bad Anſwers to their Objections againſt it, or becauſe they maintain ſome falſe Tenets as true, and as the Doctrine of Chriſt.* p. 199.

Chap. 7. *That the Difficulties which may occur in the Chriſtian Religion, ought not to bring the Truth of it into doubt.* p. 234.

The Concluſion of the ſecond Part. p. 277.

Of the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion. p. 282.

Letter 1. *Wherein is prov'd the Sincerity of the Apoſtles concerning the Teſtimony they render'd to Chriſt's Reſurrection.* p. 283.

Letter 2. *Shewing what a Miracle is, and proving that from the Miracles of Jeſus Chriſt and his Apoſtles, we ought to look upon them as Perſons truly ſent of God.* p. 307.

ERRATA.

Page 18. line 23. read *auguſta.* P. 23. l. 8. dele *and.*

OF INCREDULITY.

The PREFACE,

Containing the Design of the Author in this Work.

I Cannot determine whether, during the first Ages of Christianity, more Books were written by the Christians to evince the Truth of their Religion, than there may have been for these two hundred Years past. But that we have fewer remaining of the precedent Ages than of the last two, is most certain. The Teachers of the Primitive Church and their Followers, whilst Paganism was still considerable in the World, labour'd more in confuting the Religion of the Heathens, than to prove the Truth of that of Jesus Christ and his Apostles. They thought if they could once convince the Heathens of the Falsity of their own Opinions, that it would be no hard Matter then to make 'em Christians.

And this I could most easily shew, were it at all useful to my Design.

On the contrary, when Paganism was abolish'd in Europe, *and Christianity become the governing Religion, the Teachers of it then left Paganism to attack the Religion of the Jews, and that of the Mahumetans, both which are yet in being amongst us. But, beside these two sorts of Unbelievers, there is yet a third, who, acknowledging the Falsity of the Mahumetan and Rabbinic Doctrines, doubt notwithstanding of the Christian Religion, or peremptorily judg it not true, without setting up any other Religion in its Place. Now to reduce these, a new Method was absolutely necessary. It was agreed therefore to prove directly the Truth of Christianity, without insisting upon the Confutation of other Perswasions. And it may truly be said, to the Honour of the present Age, and of that immediately preceding it, that this Matter was never manag'd with better Success. The Heathens, the Jews, and the Mahumetans were not ill confuted before, but the Truth of the Christian Religion was far from being ever so well prov'd.*

I am of Opinion nevertheless, that there is still one thing behind, which the most part of the Writers upon this Subject have either not touch'd at all, or but very slightly; *I mean*, the secret Motives and general Reasons which the Incredulous have of not believing Christianity to be divinely reveal'd.

Their

Their internal Diſpoſition or Inclinations do ſo ſtrongly incline them to reject all the Reaſons offer'd them, (tho they are not aware themſelves of the Motives by which they do this) that all ſpeaking to 'em is in vain, before the Unreaſonableneſs of this Diſpoſition be made evident. Juſt as if any ſhould plead a good Cauſe before prepoſſeſs'd Judges, without endeavouring to cure them firſt of their Prejudices, which muſt needs make them look upon that thing as falſe, whereupon all the Reaſons alledg'd are grounded. 'Tis certain, that the Pleaders of ſuch a Cauſe, tho never ſo juſt, would expoſe themſelves to be caſt or condemn'd. This has been notwithſtanding the Conduct of a great Part of the Champions of Chriſtianity. They have prov'd the Truth of it well enough, but their Reaſons appear weak to the Incredulous, conſidering the Diſpoſition wherein they are, and whereof they know nothing themſelves. What is unreaſonable therefore in this Diſpoſition muſt be diſcover'd, and laid ſo clearly before them, that they may perceive how it impoſes upon the Light of their Underſtandings.

This is what the Author of the Chriſtian Religion has taught us, when he ſaid, that every one that doth Evil hateth the Light, neither cometh to the Light, leſt his Deeds ſhould be reproved: *which ſignifies that Unbelievers cannot look upon that as true which is contrary to the Maxims by which they have long govern'd themſelves, and to the* Joh. 3. 20.

Habits they have been contracting for many Years. On the contrary he says, that he
Ver. 21. that doth Truth cometh to the Light, that his Deeds may be made manifest: *that is to say, that such as are dispos'd to live according to the Prescriptions of the Gospel, are easily perswaded of the Truth of it. In the same Sense he says elsewhere, that* if any will
Joh. 7. 17. do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine whether it be of God, or whether of himself.

Beside the Disposition wherein those may be who disbelieve the Gospel, and which deceives them without their perceiving of it, there are likewise certain general Reasons drawn from without that help to lead them into Error. These Reasons must by all means be exploded, because they are to them so many Prejudices whereby they determine the Truth and Falsehood of all that is said to them. Whilst they think 'em good, all the Proofs imaginable can make no Impression upon them; because they never fail of opposing to them these Reasons, which concluding to be solid, they cannot at the same time embrace Christianity.

There are a world of People, for example, who, discovering several of those Doctrines that go under the Name of Christ to be false, judg of the rest by these, and reject the good with the bad. They are told of a thousand lying Miracles, to whom those of Jesus Christ and his Apostles are join'd: but finding the modern Miracles to be Impostures, they give

no

no greater Credit to those upon which the Christian Religion is grounded.

As long as they are of the mind that these Miracles are not more certain one than another, all the Consequences drawn from those of Christ appear to them as built upon a rotten Foundation, and the Christian Religion therefore but as a tottering Fabrick. It must be shewn the Incredulous then, that those Reasons drawn from without which induce them to reject the Gospel, have no Solidity in them: and after this it may be hop'd that the Proofs of its Truth may have some Effect upon their Minds.

I design to proceed according to this Method in the present Discourse, where, after having examin'd the inward Disposition of Unbelievers, and also shewing the Unreasonableness of it, I shall discover the Weakness of those Arguments drawn from without, by which they judg of the Christian Religion.

Before I begin I must once more advertise my Reader, that the Unbelievers which I attack are neither the Jews nor the Mahumetans, but those, who, making an outward Profession of the Christian Religion, conceal in the mean time their real Thoughts from the World; but when they think to do it without

Danger, they declare to their Friends in private, that they believe not the Truth of it. Not but that the Pagans, Jews, and Mahumetans are frequently guilty of the same Faults with those Unbelievers whereof I treat; but it would be Labour in vain to trouble our selves with such as never read the Writings of the Christians; and who, because of their Prejudices, are in a manner uncapable of reasoning rightly. I write merely for the sake of those Unbelievers among Christians into whose Hands this Book is like to come, or for such as may happen to be seduc'd by their Reasons.

Beside this sort of Unbelievers, that commonly reject whatever is said to be reveal'd, there is yet another kind of Men infinitely more numerous, who are Unbelievers by halves, and to whom many things in this Work may be properly apply'd. These own in general, that the Gospel is true, but will be sure to admit of no Particular therein that is absolutely incompatible with their own Inclinations or Habits. Such Doctrines they cannot perswade themselves to be Evangelick, which is almost the same thing as if they rejected half the New Testament, or rather entirely renounc'd it; seeing that Jesus Christ will not have the Heart to be thus divided between himself and the World.

Whilst

Whilſt I prove againſt them who reject all the Chriſtian Religion, that their Diſpoſitions or Inclinations cannot be the Rule of Truth and Falſhood, I ſhew to thoſe half-Unbelievers, that they groſly impoſe upon themſelves in receiving nothing of the Goſpel, but only what ſerves their turn.

Finally, *I don't pretend to have exhauſted the Subject I treat of. An infinite Number of Caſes or Queſtions may be rais'd about Matters of this nature, without any poſſibility of examining them all. And there may be, I deny not, even ſome general Maxims forgotten by me, which cannot be commodiouſly reduc'd to thoſe I have laid down, worthy nevertheleſs to be diſcuſs'd, and ſerviceable to my Deſign. But this others may do, if they think fit; or I may do it one day my ſelf, if I ſhould ever enlarge this Work.*

I have purpoſely ſaid in the Title-Page, that I examin'd the general Reaſons of Unbelievers, *that the Anſwers to many particular Objections they are wont to make may not be expected in this Book. They muſt be look'd after in Syſtems of Theology, or in the Commentators upon the Holy Scripture. But I'll preſume to ſay, that theſe particular Objections are to be little fear'd, when once all general Difficulties are remov'd out of the*

Understanding, because the same Principles that answer the one, may serve to solve the other; or, at least, prevent their having any ill Effect, if they cannot be answer'd; as it may be seen in the second Part of this Discourse.

PART

PART I.

Of the Motives of Incredulity which ſpring from the inward Diſpoſition or Inclinations of Unbelievers.

CHAP. I.

That it is unreaſonable and unjuſt to reject the Chriſtian Religion, becauſe it is contrary to the Diſpoſitions a Man finds in himſelf.

HAD Men been pure Intelligences, ſolely applying themſelves to the Search of Truth and Falſhood, diſpos'd to regulate their Lives according to the Diſcoveries they ſhould make, and all this without cauſing to them any Pain or Trouble; there could be no other thing needful, than to cure them of their Errors, or to reform their Conduct, but only to demonſtrate thoſe Truths to them whereof they

they were ignorant before, and to ſhew that they liv'd not accordingly. But the Judgments which Men form of moſt Things, depend as much upon the Habits they have contracted, and which they cannot eaſily correct, as upon the Light of their Underſtanding, and Ratiocinations. Such as are accuſtom'd, for Example, to live idly, never thinking of any thing that is uſeful, and that can thus paſs away their Time without any Apprehenſions of Poverty; theſe, I ſay, look upon all Reaſons offer'd for Pains-taking or Study, to be only the Diſcourſes of moroſe People, who are Strangers to the Enjoyments of Life. The ſtrongeſt Arguments to prove that every one is oblig'd to be ſome way uſeful to the Society whereof he's a Member, appear to ſuch without any Foundation; tho others judg 'em demonſtrative. But how comes this to paſs? 'Tis becauſe the Habit they have got of living in Idleneſs, keeps them from attentively conſidering what is ſaid; for they fix their Thoughts upon quite contrary Idea's, the Remembrance whereof is at the ſame time very grateful to them. They think upon that ſoft Indolency, and that pleaſing Lazineſs, wherein they ſpent the beſt of their days without any Chagrin; and their Minds are ſo taken up with theſe Contemplations, that there is no room left for any thing leſs agreeable.

As

As much may be ſaid of all good and Habits of a long continuance, as it muſt granted by all that are capable of ma-ng the leaſt Reflection; and this Truth ery Perſon has learn'd a thouſand times om Experience, or may do it when will.

Some body, perhaps, that has not ſuf-iently ſtudy'd the Heart of Man, will apt to ſay, that when a Habit is found be evil, it ought to be preſently ang'd into a good one. This is indeed oſt eaſily ſaid, but nothing more diffi-lt to practiſe. When a Man is us'd to certain manner of Living and Thinking, muſt be own'd that he takes Pleaſure in ; for this is the neceſſary effect of all abits: Now when once a thing is ac-ompany'd with Pleaſure, we cannot for-ear loving it; and whilſt we thus love , there is no leaving of it without great trugglings, and putting an extreme Vio-ence upon our Inclinations.

As the Habits we already have, were ontracted by degrees; ſo a great deal f time is requiſite to acquire others: for s there is need of Time to deſtroy an old Habit, ſo there is likewiſe to form a new one. For if to be undeceiv'd in any thing, it were only neceſſary to liſten like pure Spirits, we ſhould in one quarter of an Hour run from one Extreme to the other. Nothing makes Time neceſſary in order

order to become Vertuous, but becauſe we are unwilling to be ſo: and did we deſire it, we ſhould quickly learn to live honeſtly and happily. *Longam facit operam, quod repugnamus: Brevis eſt inſtitutio vitæ honeſtæ beatæque, ſi credas.* Quintil. Inſt. Orat. lib. 12. c. 6.

Should it happen then that we have Habits quite contrary to ſuch as the Chriſtian Religion requires of Men, they would certainly diſpoſe us to look upon every thing which that Religion does teach to be falſe, and to refuſe Submiſſion to its Laws. I don't ſay yet, that thoſe contrary Diſpoſitions to the Goſpel are good or bad; but I deſire only the Suppoſition which I now made to be granted me: and I think none can deny me this, without denying at the ſame time what I laid down at the Beginning, concerning the Influence our Habits have over our Reaſon, with the Difficulty of conquering them. But theſe are Truths ſo evident to all the World, that there's no Poſſibility of diſagreeing from them.

This being ſo, behold the Picture of Man that rejects the Chriſtian Religion becauſe it is contrary to his preſent Diſpoſition, however he came by it. He's a Man that ſays to himſelf, All that is taught by this Religion is falſe, becauſe it is repugnant to my Condition. I'm too honeſt a Man to deſerve Damnation; but this

his muſt nevertheleſs be, were the Chri-
ian Religion true: It is therefore falſe,
nd I ſhall never believe it.

'Tis abſurd, ſome will ſay, to ſuppoſe
Man's Diſpoſition to be good, without
ny other Proof, but that to believe the
ontrary is a troubleſome thing, and that
ne is oblig'd to condemn himſelf. No
ody, ſay they, can reaſon after this
anner, unleſs it be ſome Fool. I grant
; but there are many more Fools of this
ort than we imagine. Such as believe
heir own Sentiments to be the only true
nes in the World, (and theſe are almoſt
ll Mankind) what Judgment do they
nake of thoſe, who, without examining,
reject them? Do they not conclude, that
uch as act in that manner, being well
pleas'd with their own Condition, judg
every thing true that agrees with it, and
the contrary falſe?

'Tis true, nevertheleſs, that no body
reaſons formally ſo, diſtinctly conſider-
ing every Propoſition, and their Conne-
ction with one another. No Perſon makes
this formal Paralogiſm: I'm an honeſt
Man; what is contrary to the Idea's and
the Conduct of an honeſt Man is falſe;
therefore the Chriſtian Religion, which
is contrary to my Idea's and Conduct, is
falſe. But 'tis certain, that the Mind
ſuppoſing the two firſt Propoſitions with-
out expreſly reflecting upon them, does
thence

thence infer the mention'd Concluſion. We paſs over the Premiſes ſo quickly that we perceive not whence the Concluſion is drawn; only we find our ſelves ſtrongly perſwaded of its Truth.

Let us imagine that we underſtand the Language of the Cannibals, and that we preach to them this Maxim, receiv'd by almoſt all Nations, That to fatten Men in order to eat them, is a horrible thing. Can we believe that they would immediately agree to it? that they would deteſt their former Cuſtoms, and live ever afterwards as we do? 'Tis plain, that they would reſiſt the Truth we ſhould preach to them, as long a time as other Nations do all Sentiments contrary to their own. But what Reaſon can they pretend for this abominable manner of living? None at all, except what I have now mention'd. And 'tis ſo with all thoſe whoſe Paſſions will not permit 'em to renounce their Errors: For neither the Atrocity of the Crime, nor the Groſſneſs of the Miſtake, will cauſe any Change in their Conduct.

Were any body aſſur'd that his Diſpoſition was good and conformable to Reaſon; that is, if he had clear and evident Proofs that he was what he really ought to be, and that he could not change into better; he might then juſtly conclude, That any Doctrine repugnant to his Diſpoſition

position must be false. Knowing, for example, as we do, that it is a horrible thing to eat one another; if any notwithstanding should perswade us to eat a man, we might reasonably do all that the horror of such an Action could dictate to us. Before we follow therefore the inclinations which Custom begets in us, we ought to be fully convinc'd by clear and indubitable Reasons, that such a Custom is well grounded.

And if the Unbelievers who reject the Christian Religion because it is contrary to their Passions, had good Reasons to believe those Passions lawful, we could not reproach them with their Infidelity. But if, on the contrary, we can shew that these Passions are blameable, and contrary to the Light of Reason, 'tis certain they ought to acknowledg themselves in the wrong, and we might justly complain of their Obstinacy.

I don't know how these Maxims can be contested, seeing they are founded upon the Evidence of common Sense. It may be said, perhaps, that, without so many preambles, I should have come directly to the Point, and shew that Unbelievers refuse Assent to the Gospel from ill-grounded Prejudices. But I thought it necessary that the Principles whence I draw the following Consequences, should be seriously consider'd.

As

As thoſe who reaſon from their preſent Diſpoſition, do it without thinking on't, I take it for granted, that the greateſt part of Unbelievers commit the ſame Fault; and I beg of them to retire, as it were, into themſelves, there to examine all the Principles by which they have determin'd not to believe the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion.

Seeing the Morals of it are oppoſite to all the Vices that Reaſon condemns, it is impoſſible that any ſhould reject it, without finding himſelf engag'd in ſome of theſe Vices: For why ſhould any reject as falſe what is conformable to Reaſon, except it be that he's in a Diſpoſition contrary to this ſame Reaſon? Although 'tis not always perceiv'd, it follows not that the thing is otherwiſe. It merits therefore ſome Attention.

The Morals of the Goſpel are reduc'd, according to the Expreſſion of one of Chriſt's Apoſtles, to live Temperately, Juſtly, and Piouſly. Temperance comprehends all the Vertues which regard our Selves; Juſtice them that concern our Neighbour; and Piety thoſe which relate to God. Our own Good requires us to live temperately, as the Heathen Philoſophers have demonſtrated: Now Temperance conſiſts in a moderate Deſire of Honours, Riches, and Pleaſures. We ſhould not court Honours but by lawful ways,

ways, not as a means to live great, but to be uſeful to the Society wherein we live. And this cannot be, except we are capable of duly diſcharging thoſe Offices which we ſeek, and of uſing thoſe Honours we are ambitious of, to good purpoſe. As for Riches, the Goſpel forbids us to deſire 'em as a Good; but if, without breach of any Chriſtian Vertue, we become rich, it commands us, not to deprive our ſelves of what is neceſſary, but to impart our Superfluities to the Needy. And as to Pleaſures, we may take none but ſuch as are not contrary to any Duty the Goſpel enjoins, and in ſuch a meaſure as will not engage us to violate any of its Laws. Thus the Goſpel will have us to ſacrifice all our Pleaſures to what it ordains us, and that we reſolve upon ſuffering all ſorts of Evils, rather than neglect one of its Commands. Theſe are the principal Duties very near, that regard our ſelves: for I deſign not to make here a complete Abridgement of the Chriſtian Morals: for my Subject does not require it; and it ſuffices that I bring to mind the chief Heads of them.

The Juſtice which the Goſpel recommends to us, does contain two things: One is, to render every one his Due; and this is what the Heathens themſelves call'd *Juſtice*. The other is, to do for our Neighbour all that we would wiſh him to

As thoſe who reaſon from their preſent Diſpoſition, do it without thinking on't, I take it for granted, that the greateſt part of Unbelievers commit the ſame Fault; and I beg of them to retire, as it were, into themſelves, there to examine all the Principles by which they have determin'd not to believe the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion.

Seeing the Morals of it are oppoſite to all the Vices that Reaſon condemns, it is impoſſible that any ſhould reject it, without finding himſelf engag'd in ſome of theſe Vices: For why ſhould any reject as falſe what is conformable to Reaſon, except it be that he's in a Diſpoſition contrary to this ſame Reaſon? Although 'tis not always perceiv'd, it follows not that the thing is otherwiſe. It merits therefore ſome Attention.

The Morals of the Goſpel are reduc'd, according to the Expreſſion of one of Chriſt's Apoſtles, to live Temperately, Juſtly, and Piouſly. Temperance comprehends all the Vertues which regard our Selves; Juſtice them that concern our Neighbour; and Piety thoſe which relate to God. Our own Good requires us to live temperately, as the Heathen Philoſophers have demonſtrated: Now Temperance conſiſts in a moderate Deſire of Honours, Riches, and Pleaſures. We ſhould not court Honours but by lawful ways,

ways, not as a means to live great, but to be useful to the Society wherein we live. And this cannot be, except we are capable of duly discharging those Offices which we seek, and of using those Honours we are ambitious of, to good purpose. As for Riches, the Gospel forbids us to desire 'em as a Good; but if, without breach of any Christian Vertue, we become rich, it commands us, not to deprive our selves of what is necessary, but to impart our Superfluities to the Needy. And as to Pleasures, we may take none but such as are not contrary to any Duty the Gospel enjoins, and in such a measure as will not engage us to violate any of its Laws. Thus the Gospel will have us to sacrifice all our Pleasures to what it ordains us, and that we resolve upon suffering all sorts of Evils, rather than neglect one of its Commands. These are the principal Duties very near, that regard our selves: for I design not to make here a complete Abridgment of the Christian Morals: for my Subject does not require it; and it suffices that I bring to mind the chief Heads of them.

The Justice which the Gospel recommends to us, does contain two things: One is, to render every one his Due; and this is what the Heathens themselves call'd *Justice*. The other is, to do for our Neighbour all that we would wish him to

do for us were we in his Condition: that we ſhould pardon him, for Example, when he does us wrong, rather than to revenge it; and help him in all that we can, and that is no way contrary to the Precepts of the Goſpel. The Civil Laws may compel us, in part at leaſt, to render every Man his Due, and they are eſtabliſh'd for this purpoſe; but nothing can oblige us to do more, except the Deſire of living conformable to the Chriſtian Morals. The Heathens themſelves have acknowledg'd, that to be good Men there was need of a great deal more than the Civil Laws requir'd. What a poor Vertue is it, ſays a Philoſopher, to be only good according to the Laws? How much larger is the Rule of the Duties we are oblig'd to, than that of the Law? How many things are requir'd by Piety, Humanity, Juſtice, Liberality, and Fidelity, that are not expreſt in the publick Records? *Quam auguſta innocentia eſt ad legem bonum eſſe? Quanto latius patet officiorum, quam juris regula? Quam multa pietas, humanitas, liberalitas, juſtitia, fides exigunt, quæ omnia extra publicas tabulas ſunt?*

As it would be impoſſible to fulfil theſe Duties upon all ſorts of Occaſions, eſpecially when the Obſervation of them ſhould endanger Reputation, Goods, or Life, if there were no Reward to be expected in this Life nor after Death by ſuch as liv'd according

according to the Gospel; so God has promis'd to protect good Men here as far as should be needful for them, and to render them eternally happy hereafter. To believe these Promises, and to have that Gratitude for the Divinity which his Goodness requires of us, is what the Gospel calls Piety.

This is an Abridgment of the Morals of Jesus Christ, and which no body can reject, but because he's not dispos'd to live accordingly; as I'm going to shew by some Examples.

When Jesus Christ and his Apostles began to preach the Gospel, few Persons of Quality, or that pretended to considerable Employments, embrac'd it, as we learn it from themselves. At this day such as doubt of the Truth of Christianity, or are resolv'd to believe it false, are frequently Men of the same Rank. All that are acquainted with the World know very well, that the common People, and those that have no aspiring Thoughts, are more rarely troubl'd with Incredulity or Doubts than Persons of Quality, and those who pretend to great Preferments, or think themselves worthy of such.

If we look for the Reasons of this in the Persons themselves, we shall not find that the Ambitious do reason better than others, or discover Defects in Christiani-

ty unknown to the reſt of the World. On the contrary, ſuch as think of nothing but advancing themſelves, do not commonly ſtudy much in the Goſpel; and as they are ignorant of the Beauties of it, they could not be more capable than others to find out the Weakneſs of it if it had any. All the Knowledg they poſſeſs above the reſt of Men, is only the Art of ſo governing themſelves in the World as to come at their Ends.

The true Reaſon why they doubt, or that throws them into Incredulity, is nothing elſe but their predominant Paſſion Ambition, which is too oppoſite to the Morals of the Goſpel, to lodg in any Heart throughly perſwaded of its Truth, or touch'd by its Maxims. Let us ſuppoſe a Man very deſirous to poſſeſs a conſiderable Charge without having fit Talents for it; or if he has, that he deſigns not to ſerve his Country by his Place, but only to live ſplendidly and luxuriouſly: we may ſuppoſe farther, that he makes uſe of all Tricks to obtain it, and that he's ready to do any thing ſooner than miſs of it. This Paſſion which entirely takes him up, and fills his whole Imagination with the Pleaſure that accompanies all his Deſires, makes him look upon his own Conduct as the moſt reaſonable and the moſt innocent in the World. If a Man in this Diſpoſition hears of the Goſpel (the firſt time we may

may ſuppoſe) and be told what Chriſt ſaid of Ambition, can any wonder if he rejects it, or is the Reaſon of it hard to be gueſs'd?

Notwithſtanding, it were eaſy to ſhew that what the Goſpel teaches concerning Ambition is conformable to the cleareſt Evidence of good Senſe, and that many Pagan Philoſophers have taught it likewiſe. If the Diſpoſition therefore of an ambitious Man determines him to disbelieve the Goſpel, he muſt own at the ſame time, that he acts contrary to the cleareſt Light of Reaſon.

The ſame Reaſoning may be properly made concerning the avaritious, the voluptuous, the unjuſt, the vindicative Man, and all others that are engag'd in Habits oppoſite to the Goſpel. A certain *Portugueze* call'd *Uriel Acoſta*, who turn'd Jew, and fell into Sadduciſm, could not digeſt that Precept of the Goſpel, *viz. to love our Enemies*; becauſe being naturally revengeful, and having been ill us'd by the Jews of *Amſterdam*, he could never find in his Heart to forgive them. He concluded therefore, that the Practice of this Command being impoſſible, it was in vain to give it to Men, and could not believe that God had reveal'd it.

'Tis true, that a Man extremely vindicative, and for many Years indulging himſelf in this Paſſion, cannot, without a

Miracle, be brought of a ſudden to pardon, or patiently to ſuffer Injuries. In this Diſpoſition he's always ſure to reject the Goſpel, by reaſon of this one Precept, or at leaſt to refuſe Submiſſion to this Article, ſuppoſing that the reſt are not too repugnant to his Inclinations. But if in thoſe Intervals wherein his Revenge is as it were ſuſpended a while, he comes to conſider the fatal Effects of this Paſſion, which would engage Men, if they always obey'd it, in perpetual Wars and Quarrels that could never terminate but in the Death of one or both the Perſons; he muſt acknowledg that Revenge is a moſt dangerous Paſſion, and that one or the other had better forgive his Enemy, or rather to pardon one another, ſo to put an end to their mutual Injuries. He will wiſh, it may be, that his Enemies would entertain the ſame Conſideration, and caſt off this Spirit of Vengeance, being ready to do as much on his ſide. The more this Thought comes into his Mind, the more reaſonable it will appear to him, and the more conformable to the true Intereſts of Mankind. By little and little will the Deſire of ſeeing his Enemies cur'd of ſo great an Imperfection increaſe; and he will inſenſibly rid himſelf of it, to ſhew them a good Example. At length, inſtead of longing to revenge himſelf upon his Enemies, inſtead of making Impre-

precations againſt them, he'll ardently wiſh they may become better Men, and will beg it of God in his Prayers. Nay, he'll on his ſide, as much as poſſible, contribute towards it, and after praying God, as he do's for himſelf, that his Enemies may become more vertuous, he'll wiſh 'em all that God is wont to beſtow and more, as much as he would deſire it for himſelf. Now, this it is *to love our Enemies*, for we cannot love them above our ſelves, and the Goſpel requires no more.

It will be granted that theſe Thoughts are moſt reaſonable, and that it were to be wiſh'd all Mankind had the like Idea's. And as Men ſo diſpos'd would very eaſily comprehend the Poſſibility of loving our Enemies, they would be far from doubting of the Truth of Chriſtianity upon the ſcore of this Precept.

All that can be ſaid to this, is, that thoſe who reject the Religion of Chriſt, do it not upon the Account of its Morals, which are beyond Contradiction very good, and grounded upon the cleareſt Light of Reaſon; but becauſe it contains, in their Opinion, incredible Myſteries, and ſuppoſes Miracles that have no Probability.

Two things we muſt remark then, that we may know whether the Difficulty they pretend of believing the Myſteries and Miracles of Religion, or whether the Di-

like of its moral Precepts, is the true Cauſe of their Incredulity. The firſt is, if they don't believe many things as incomprehenſible or perplex'd: And the ſecond, if the Maxims of their Morals be as reaſonable as thoſe of the Goſpel, or if they be not plainly oppoſite to it. If it happens that upon all other Accounts they readily believe things they do not comprehend, and that the Rules of their Conduct be more than the Goſpel admits, do they not give us juſt Occaſion to ſuſpect that their ill Habits are the ſecret, but true Cauſe of their Disbelief of the Goſpel, whatever they pretend?

There is nothing ſo common as to ſee Unbelievers ſtrongly perſwaded of Judiciary Aſtrology, and believing that Magicians can do ſeveral things beyond the Power and Order of Nature. Two great Miniſters of State, for example, whoſe Actions will not let us think that Religion was one of their greateſt Vertues, are both accus'd of believing the Predictions of Aſtrologers: and one of them of perſwading himſelf that a Man who vomited ſeveral ſorts of Liquors, did it by the Help of Magick. Cardinal *Richlieu*, ſays an Hiſtorian, conſulted, beſides Aſtrology, all kinds of Divination, even ſilly Women, whoſe Knowledg conſiſts in Vapours that make 'em foretel by chance ſome fortuitous Events. He was ſo credulous

ulous as to attribute to the Operation of he Devil the Art of throwing out at the Mouth all ſorts of Liquors, after having rſt drunk Water, as was done by an Ita- an Mountebank. *Mazarin*, who was not et a Cardinal, having at ſo ſimple a Diſ- ourſe burſt out a laughing, had like to ſe his Favour by it: for the Cardinal eing provok'd at this Mirth, whereby he hought *Mazarin* jeer'd him, ſaid ironi- lly to him, that he was not Monſieur *Mazarin* who had a profound and exact nowledg of every thing. *Mazarin* ve- ſubmiſſively reply'd, that giving the fty Piſtols which the Mountebank de- anded for teaching his Secret, it might e ſeen whether the Devil had any hand 't. *Mazarin* himſelf look'd upon all ivinations as Fopperies, except Aſtrolo- y, which he ſtrongly fancy'd, tho he ign'd the contrary. When Madam *Man- i* his Siſter dy'd, and afterwards the utcheſs of *Mercœur* his Niece, according the Prediction of an Aſtrologer, at *ome*, given in Writing a great while efore, he became extraordinary ſad and elancholy, not out of Tenderneſs to his elations, but becauſe this ſame Aſtrolo- r had fix'd the Term of his own Death a Time that was very near. He loſt s Appetite upon it, and ſlept not for ma- Nights, *&c.*

'Tis

'Tis also known, that the Emperor *Julian*, who could not believe the Prophecies of the Old and New Testament, was extremely addicted to the Auguries and Presages drawn from the Intrals of Victims, and the Heathens themselves have blam'd him for it.

I take it for granted, that such things as these are as hard to be credited, consider'd in themselves, as the Mysteries and Miracles of the Christian Religion. But the Incredulous believe them at the same time that they refuse their Assent to the Gospel; because these Opinions do not regard the manner of any Person's living, and are not at all incompatible, as the Christian Morals are, with their ill Habits.

Moreover, if the Unbelievers would strictly examine themselves, and compare their Conduct with that which the Gospel prescribes, I'll own my self much deceiv'd if they find it Proof against the Rigour of its Precepts. *Julian*, of whom I was speaking, had many excellent Qualities which he needed not to quit by any means, had he remain'd still a Christian; and several bad ones he had likewise, which he must have rid himself of, would he follow the Morals of the Gospel. At least, it is certain that he could not be so injurious to the Christians as he was, which appears by many of his Letters.

From

From all this I conclude, that notwithstanding whatever can be ſaid, the Diſpoſition of a Perſon does exceedingly contribute to make him receive or reject Chriſtianity; and that Unbelievers ought to examine themſelves hereupon, to ſee whether this, whereof we accuſe them, be not true.

CHAP. II.

That Pride may be the Cauſe why Aſſent is not granted to the Proofs of the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion.

PRide is inconſiſtent with a ſtrong and lively perſwaſion that Chriſtianity is true; not only becauſe the Goſpel condemns it, as it does all other Paſſions contrary to the Good of Mankind, but alſo becauſe thoſe affected with it find themſelves diſpos'd by a particular Effect of this Vice to reject unexamin'd the Proofs alledg'd for the Truth of the Goſpel. This is what I deſign to ſhew, after I have firſt deſcrib'd Pride and its contrary Vertue Humility, leſt what I am to ſay concerning it ſhould not be ſo well underſtood.

Pride is no other thing but a Diſpoſition of Mind that makes a Man imagine he poſſeſſes

ſeſſes more Knowledg, Endowments or Vertues than he truly does; and that by Conſequence he ſhould be more honour'd and eſteem'd than he deſerves. The Proud cannot without Vexation bear that the one or the other ſhould be deny'd to them, eſpecially if they are not refus'd to other Perſons. They have not only a high Idea of themſelves, but likewiſe deſpiſe others, who, they are eaſily perſwaded, have not the ſame good Qualities, nor any thing worthy of that Eſteem which they pretend to be their own due. The too good Opinion any conceives of himſelf, is ever accompany'd with a Contempt of others, and both the one and the other are equally apparent outwardly. Thoſe who ſuffer themſelves to be blinded with this Paſſion, believe not only that there are no good Qualities except in their own Perſons, and in ſuch as admire them; but they alſo abhor all that to them appears ordinary, and think they ſhould debaſe themſelves, had they any Thoughts that were common to ſeveral others.

Such were, for example, the antient Stoicks, who imagin'd they had more Knowledg than all the World beſides, and that they were above thoſe Weakneſſes remarkable in other Men. They look'd upon thoſe with Scorn and Pity (if their Principles would permit 'em to have any) who were not perſwaded of their Doctrines.

ctrines. They troubl'd themſelves little with the Sentiments of others which they conſider'd as idle Dreams, and never ſpoke of the moſt ordinary things but in ſtrange Terms. Pain was not an Evil, Pleaſure was not a Good, all Vertues were equal, there was no Difference between Vices; their Sage only had common Senſe, all others were Fools. They utter'd a thouſand Paradoxes of this Nature, only to diſtinguiſh themſelves from the Vulgar, who have Ideas very oppoſite to theſe.

On the contrary *Humility*, which is the ſame Vertue the Heathens call'd *Modeſty*, conſiſts in having no other Sentiments of our ſelves but what are proportion'd to our good Qualities, and not to pretend to Honours that are not due to us. Nay, this Vertue goes yet further, and thoſe whom we may call humble patiently ſuffer themſelves to be debas'd much below their Merit. As thoſe who have this Vertue eſteem not themſelves more than they ought, ſo they are far from deſpiſing others, and willing to do them all the Juſtice they can reaſonably wiſh. Nor are they vex'd to ſee People that are their Inferiours in many reſpects exalted above them, and more conſider'd than they deſerve.

This Vertue may be remarkably ſeen in the Primitive Chriſtians, who perfectly knowing the Errors of the Heathens, and the

the Defects of their Philosophy, did not reject however all that it taught, to distinguish themselves from the Pagan Philosophers. On the contrary, they readily approv'd all that was good in it, and were transported to discover a Conformity between the Notions of those Sages admir'd by the Multitude, and the Doctrines of the Gospel. They even confess'd with great Sincerity, that the Heathen Authors did much surpass in Eloquence the first Writers of the Christian Religion. *Clemens Alexandrinus* in his *Stromates*, and *Eusebius* in his *Evangelick Preparation*, can furnish a thousand Proofs of it; as well as many other Ecclesiastical Authors whom I need not cite.

Such therefore as reject Sentiments generally receiv'd, or at least receiv'd by a great Number of Persons, should take care that the Love of Singularity, rather than a Demonstration that others are mistaken, has made them quit the beaten Road. 'Tis true indeed that the Multitude of those who embrace a certain Opinion, is not a good Proof of the Truth of it; but on the other hand it is no cogent Argument that a thing is false, because many People believe it.

It is certain notwithstanding, that to be distinguish'd from the Croud, a Man frequently rejects what he believes true, for no other Reason, but because it is a vulgar

gar Notion. A vain Spirit cannot bear hat he ſhould be equall'd in any thing to n infinite number of Perſons whoſe Know-edg he believes inferiour to his own, and hoſe mean Inclinations aim at nothing ut what is common.

I'm perſwaded that ſeveral are Unbe-evers, becauſe at leaſt the fundamental octrines of Chriſtianity are extremely ommon. They think it noble to be ndeceiv'd concerning vulgar Opinions, nd to look upon others as People that eed themſelves upon Chimera's. A Man hus conceited of himſelf, thinks he's ele-ated far above the credulous Multitude, hich is led rather by Cuſtom, than gui-ed by Reaſon. "There is nothing ſo pleaſant, ſays an Epicurean Poet, as to live in the exalted Temple of Wiſ-dom, where you may enjoy a perpetual Calm, and whence you may look down upon other Men wandring and ſcatter'd in their different ways of living.

—Nil dulcius eſt benè quam munita tenere
Edita doctrinâ ſapientum templa ſerena;
Deſpicere unde queas alios, paſſimq; videre
Errare, atq; viam palantes quærere vitæ.

But at bottom, one expoſes himſelf, as have ſaid already, as much to Deception by contemning whatever the Vulgar eems, for no other Reaſon than this;

as

as by blindly embracing all that the Multitude authorizes. Neither its Approbation nor its Hatred are the proper marks of Truth or Falſhood. If there have been Chimera's generally receiv'd, there have been alſo as many ridiculous Notions countenanc'd by a ſmall number of People who imagin'd themſelves more knowing than others. Therefore when any finds himſelf inclin'd to forſake vulgar Sentiments, he ought to take heed that he be not impos'd upon by the agreeable Thoughts of being exempted from thoſe Errors wherein he ſees others engag'd. This may be as well the Deluſion of a ſecret Pride, as the Effect of uncommon Knowledg.

It is by ſo much the more dangerous to fall out of Vanity into any ſingular Thoughts, as that when once a Man is govern'd by this Principle, it is the hardeſt thing in the World to make him change his Mind. The ſame Paſſion that leads him into it, confirms him in it inſenſibly, by reaſon of the Pleaſure wherewith it fills thoſe who will be blinded by it, repreſenting them, as I ſaid, to themſelves as Perſons highly elevated above the Vulgar. Beſide all this, vain People imagining they are more clear-ſighted than others, eaſily believe themſelves never miſtaken, and that the reſt of Men have not the neceſſary Sagacity for diſcovering the Truth. This

This is the reaſon that when any, whereof they have not ſo good an Opinion as of themſelves, propoſes to them Sentiments contrary to their own, they will not ſo much as give him the Hearing. The firſt Thought that offers it ſelf then to their Minds, or, if you pleaſe, the Sentiment that is awak'd in their Heart, is, that if this Man ſpoke the Truth, it would follow that a Perſon whom they deſpiſe, and not, as they think, without Reaſon, ſhould have more Penetration and a ſounder Judgment than themſelves. But this is what they can never agree to; for ſo they muſt entirely change the pleaſing Idea they hitherto entertain'd of themſelves and others. They would be oblig'd to allow thoſe whom they always believ'd much their Inferiours, a more conſiderable Rank in their Eſteem than themſelves, and, in certain Regards, acknowledg their Superiority.

I ſhall illuſtrate this Truth by ſome Examples. Let's take a Jewiſh Doctor, and, if you will, of the Sacerdotal Race. Suppoſe him to have ſtudied the Laws of *Moſes* with great Application, and the Traditions currant among the Jews in the Apoſtles time. Add likewiſe, that he ſucceeded well enough in this Study, according to the Notion Men had of it then; that he thereby acquir'd a great Reputati-

on amongſt the moſt conſiderable of his Nation; and had been preferr'd to the greateſt Honours they could confer upon him. A Man in theſe Circumſtances might very eaſily conceive a good Opinion of his own Perſon and Underſtanding, and conſequently deſpiſe ſuch as were deſtitute of thoſe things which procur'd him all that Honour and Eſteem.

Now let us ſuppoſe, that one of the common People, not of the Prieſtly Stock, neither skill'd in the Law, nor of any Eſteem in the World, goes to ſee this eminent Prieſt, and tells him of things directly contrary to his Sentiments; maintains againſt him, for inſtance, That the beſt part of the Traditions he had learn'd were contrary to the true Senſe of the Law, and that a Man may be acceptable to God without obſerving any of the Moſaick Ceremonies. Now what would the Prieſt, think you, anſwer to this? What Opinion would he have of a Perſon that ſhould ſpeak after this manner? 'Tis no difficult Buſineſs to gueſs, that he would treat this Man with Indignation and Contempt; a little of his Pity is the moſt he could expect. It is plain notwithſtanding, that the Prieſt would be more deſerving of this Treatment, whatever good Opinion he had of himſelf.

To ſet the Effects of Pride in another Light, let us imagine an Epicurean Philoſopher,

loſopher, a Man of Parts, and that by his Writings and Diſcourſes had got himſelf a conſiderable Reputation amongſt the Greeks, ſuch as *Lucian* was for Example, or any other that you pleaſe. This Man was accuſtom'd for a great while to laugh at the Heathen Religion, wherein, doubtleſs, he was not to blame; but he alſo join'd to it all other Religions, without examining them. He looks upon Religion in general as mere Superſtition, or as a Trick of Politicians to impoſe upon the Simple. He has a hundred times declaim'd among his Friends againſt the Infatuation and Prejudices of Mankind in this reſpect; nor did he miſs the Return of Applauſe from thoſe of the ſame Diſpoſition. His Friend's and his own Railleries againſt Religion have been a long time the beſt ſeaſoning of their Converſation and Debauches.

Let us alſo ſend this Philoſopher to ſome vulgar Perſon, who undertakes to prove againſt him, that his Epicureaniſm is the moſt abſurd thing in the World; and endeavours to inſpire him with ſome Awe of a Divinity, whoſe Providence governs the Univerſe. I deſire not that this ſhould be granted me as true or probable, but let us ſuppoſe it ſo a minute or two. Now, What will the Epicurean ſay? He'll preſently put on a jeering Countenance, and laugh at all this

Man has said to him, without examining any part of it. And indeed, What Probability is there that a Person of Wit should condescend to learn of one who seems to have none, and who is infatuated to boot with the Opinions of the Mob?

These Examples belong properly to the Ages past; and to be sensible of their Force, we must, as it were, forget our own Time, and imagine our selves living before we had yet a Being. But such as have any Knowledg of Antiquity and the present Time, and have compar'd our Passions with those of our Predecessors, know that the Theatre of the World has only chang'd its Ornaments, and that the Heart of Man is the same now as heretofore.

Men are proud, as they have always been; and it must be granted, that this Passion may work the same Effect now, as it could have upon a Jewish Priest or Epicurean Philosopher sixteen hundred Years ago. We see every day, that a Man prejudic'd in favour of an Opinion, defends it out of Vanity, against the clearest Evidence of Reason. A Professor, for Instance, that in the University has long taught the old Philosophy or the old Physick, not only rejects the most ingenious and probable Conjectures of the Moderns, but even those Demonstrations which shew us the Errors of the Antients as plain as the

the Sun. The Reaſon of this Conduct is no other, but that if he acknowledg'd what the Moderns ſay to be true, he muſt at the ſame time own that he taught nothing for many Years but pure Chimera's: nor can he find in his heart to humble himſelf ſo much to others, who have diſcover'd Truths whereof he's ignorant.

Thoſe who doubt of the Chriſtian Religion, or that reject it, ought to retire within themſelves, and conſider why they yield not to its Reaſons. They will find perhaps, that the imaginary Pleaſure of being above the common Level, and their Unwillingneſs to be in the ſame Rank with ſuch as they deſpiſe, are the true Cauſes which retain them in their Doubts and Infidelity; or at leaſt, that this Diſpoſition contributes towards it very much.

As it cannot be deny'd that Pride is a Vice, and Modeſty a Vertue, it muſt be granted, that ſuch as act by a Principle of Pride do put themſelves in danger, at leaſt of being deceiv'd; and that therefore Pride ſhould never be concern'd in the Search of Truth.

This every body will own; but I may be ask'd, How we ſhall know that a Man judges by a Principle of Vanity, and by what means we can defend our ſelves from the Deluſions of Pride? for thoſe who reject the common Opinions, will not acknowledg that they do it out of Vanity.

To this I answer, that besides a Man's own Consciousness, we may know by two things whether the Motive of Pride comes into our Judgments of things.

The first is, that when we judg after that manner, we never carefully examine the Matter in question. We content our selves with a very general and superficial Review; after which we peremptorily conclude, without ever beginning our Examen anew. 'Tis to no purpose for those who are condemn'd to beg a little patient Hearing, or to have their Reasons exactly consider'd once more; for they shall no longer be listen'd to. They are condemn'd without Appeal, and can never recover themselves. So a Judgment once made without Examination, serves for a Principle to others, who continue to condemn on what they never well thought of, and will not grant any Hearing to their Adversaries.

If any doubts of what I say, let those who out of Pride have rashly decided against the Truth they did not understand, endeavour exactly to repeat the Reasons of them they have condemn'd. Had they judg'd after a mature Examen, which requires a long and strict Discussion of all that was alledg'd in Defence of what they condemn'd, they would so well understand it, as never to forget it. They could repeat, and shew the Weakness of each Reason

ſon brought againſt them: As we ſee a Judg, that has carefully read and examin'd all the Parts and Papers of a Trial, report the Particulars without any Heſitation; eſpecially when it is a Matter of Conſequence, and deſerving Attention.

But I take it for granted, that thoſe who reject the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion, cannot diſtinctly report the Reaſons of ſuch as defend it, nor tell what they except againſt in every one of them. This is what they ſhould examine themſelves about, and without which, they muſt confeſs they did pronounce a haſty Sentence: nor can they, without Injuſtice, refuſe to examine once again a Matter of ſo great Importance.

All the Books that have been ſeen, and all the Diſcourſes we could hear upon this Subject, contain only ſome looſe Difficulties, which ſeem by no means to be the Reſult of an exact and methodical Examination. Theſe Difficulties cannot be more ſufficient to inform thoſe who would judg ſolidly of ſo great an Affair, than the Objections of one of the Parties are to inform equitable Judges.

We have therefore Reaſon to believe, that thoſe who declare themſelves againſt the Chriſtian Religion, after reſolving out of Vanity againſt the common Sentiments, continue to reject them by the ſame Principle. I confeſs they may have,

and that they actually have, other Motives; for it is very rare, that in a Judgment which is made of a Subject ſo full as the Chriſtian Religion with all its Conſequences, there ſhould not enter Motives of divers ſorts. But I maintain, that the particular one of Pride, I have been ſpeaking of, is found among the reſt. I won't ſay here, that the other Motives, whatever they may be, are not better than this. I ſhall prove it in the Sequel of this Work: for 'tis enough now to ſhew that Vanity is concern'd in't.

Another thing whereby it may be known what great Influence Pride had upon a Judgment made of any Subject, is, that after having embrac'd an Opinion that cannot be demonſtrated, 'tis preſum'd that this Opinion unexamin'd muſt ſerve as an infallible Rule to judg of Truth and Falſhood. Mathematicians have their Axioms, their Definitions, and their Suppoſitions, which they do not demonſtrate, by reaſon of their own great Clearneſs and Plainneſs, which puts 'em beyond the Reach of all ſorts of Doubts. They have Reaſon to ſuppoſe them therefore, without proving them; but to ſuppoſe moſt obſcure and uncertain, not to ſay falſe things, and to make uſe of thoſe Suppoſitions as Principles, is abſurd. To expect this Method ſhould be approved of, and to treat ſcornfully thoſe who reject it, is

ſo

so ſenſible a Mark of their being govern'd by Vanity, that I do not know a greater Proof can be given of it.

The Jews, for Example, when the Goſpel begun to appear in the World, thought they had a Right to ſuppoſe as indiſputable the eternal Duration of the Moſaick Law, and the Neceſſity of obſerving it in order to become acceptable to God; that to demand a Proof of it was ſufficient to gain their Hatred. The Greek Philoſophers likewiſe of that time, look'd upon themſelves as ſo knowing, and upon their Opinions as ſo well eſtabliſh'd, that every thing was falſe, in their Judgment, which contradicted them the leaſt in the World. Nevertheleſs it may be ſaid, that the particular Principles of the Jews and Heathen Philoſophers, compar'd to Chriſtianity, were not even probable; as I could ſhew, if thoſe I have to do with doubted of it. So the Jews, thoſe *blind Guides of the Blind*, and the Greeks conceited of a thouſand Chimera's, concluded the Goſpel to be falſe out of mere Vanity.

Thoſe who, being educated among Chriſtians, are got into the ſame Fancy, ſhould take heed they do not commit the like Fault, unleſs they will be voluntarily deceiv'd. Let them examine then whether, in the Judgment they form of Chriſtianity, they ſuppoſe nothing but what is clear and inconteſtable. They reproach

Chriſtians

Christians with making Suppositions without Proofs; let them not be guilty therefore themselves of what they object to others.

For my own part, I'm perswaded that if they go back to the first Principles of their Reasonings, and then reduce them to certain Propositions, they will be convinc'd of their having built upon the most obscure and incomprehensible Principles that ever were. To suppose, for example, that *there is but one Substance in the World, compounded of Extension and Thought, and which modifies it self, as we see the Universe is, without having any supreme Intelligence distinct from the Universe it self concern'd about it:* To suppose, I say, so strange a Proposition without demonstrating it, is certainly to imagine that the peremptory manner of saying such obscure things serves them for Evidence or Demonstration. When I say *to demonstrate*, I understand, as Mathematicians do, what leaves no Doubt nor Difficulty behind in the Minds of any who understand the Terms of the Demonstration. Otherwise they must not talk of demonstrating, unless they would impose upon the Weak by this Word. Let the Writings of those be read over and over who maintain the Proposition I have mention'd, and ground themselves upon it, to deny the Truth of Christianity, and it will appear that there is

is nothing in all Religion which equals the obſcuring of this Principle. There are notwithſtanding ſome People, who utter it as an inconteſtable Truth, and judg thereby of whatever the Chriſtians ſay concerning God, the Creation of the World, and Providence. If theſe People would diligently examine themſelves, I'm much deceiv'd if they did not diſcover that one of the greateſt Reaſons which brings them to think this a clear Principle, is, their valuing themſelves upon defending an Opinion remote from vulgar Notions, and of admitting rather the moſt obſcure things imaginable, than they ſhould mix again with the Croud, from which they endeavour'd hereby to diſtinguiſh themſelves. As Credulity and Superſtition add to their Objects, as it were, a falſe Light, which ſerves them inſtead of Evidence: So Pride makes a Geometrical Principle of a thing that's in it ſelf unintelligible.

There are other Perſons to whom this Dogmatical and peremptory Air is ſo diſpleaſing, that they equally condemn ſuch as ſtick to the vulgar Opinions, and thoſe who, forſaking what is commonly receiv'd, endeavour to eſtabliſh new Principles. They think that ſeeing there are Difficulties every where, and thoſe ſometimes inſurmountable, the ſureſt way is to affirm nothing, and to reject all without eſta-

eſtabliſhing any thing. I will not undertake to confute this Principle here; I ſhall only ſay, that altho this Way ſeems very different from that whereof we have been ſpeaking, it is probable nevertheleſs that it proceeds from the like Diſpoſition of Mind. It is not much leſs agreeable to humane Pride to conſider it ſelf ſecur'd from popular Errors by doubting of every thing, than by eſtabliſhing Principles contrary to thoſe that are commonly receiv'd. Some look upon other Men as the Sport of their Opinions, and the Prey, to ſpeak ſo, of a thouſand Chimeras; whilſt, under the Shelter of Doubt, they think themſelves ſafe from the Danger of Error.

It might be ſaid nevertheleſs by ſome Men, that not Pride, but the mere Impoſſibility of diſcovering the Truth, which is a very mortifying thing, is the Cauſe of their Doubts. I won't ſay that they appear not over-mortify'd who are in this Condition, nor will I ſet about to ſhew the Abſurdity of Scepticiſm; I ſhall only remark, that no body ſtops at a mere Doubt in Religion. Thoſe who ſay they have Doubts, are not content to look upon others as poſſibly deceiv'd, but as effectually ſo. They conſider not themſelves as Perſons who might well be in an Error, but as having found the true Secret of Infallibility; and this may be the

Effect

Effect of humane Pride, as much as the boldeſt Determinations. Let them have a great Care therefore; and ſince it is manifeſt, that to doubt as well as to affirm out of Vanity, is expoſing of ones ſelf to Error, let them get rid of this fallacious Paſſion; or, at leaſt, ſuſpend the Influence of it whilſt they judg of Religion.

We require not this of them from the Principles of that Religion whereof they doubt, or which they reject, but from this Maxim of common Senſe, *viz. That a Paſſion, ſuch as Pride is, cannot be of any Service in the Diſcovery of the Truth.*

CHAP. III.

That what keeps Unbelievers from yielding to the Proofs of the Chriſtian Religion, partly conſiſts perhaps in mere Prejudices, which all the while may be falſe.

WERE I writing againſt the Pagans, Jews, or Mahometans, and ſhould ſay that their Prejudices kept them wedded to the Religions whereof they made Profeſſion; then all the World, as well thoſe who believe as thoſe that disbelieve Chriſtianity, would conclude me in the right. But as I write againſt Men

Men that have been educated in the Chriſtian Religion, and that are not perſwaded of its Truth, it may be ask'd what it is I underſtand here by Prejudices, when I ſay that they are the Cauſe, perhaps, why Unbelievers yield not their Aſſent to it. They were brought up, as I ſaid, in Chriſtianity, which, one would think, ſhould prejudice them in favour of this Religion. But there are two ſorts of Prejudices; the firſt are the Effects of Inſtruction, ſuch as are thoſe of the Jews, of the Heathens, and of the Mahumetans, againſt Chriſtianity. The ſecond proceed from a particular Depravation of the Mind and Underſtanding of ſome, and whereof it is ſomewhat difficult to render a Reaſon.

Theſe People do eaſily conquer ſometimes the Prejudices of their Education; but after ſlightly forming to themſelves other Notions without examining them as they ſhould, they afterwards become Prejudices to them all the reſt of their Lives; and 'tis of theſe Prejudices I deſign to treat upon this occaſion. I ſhall not determine how they are form'd, becauſe they owe their Original to ſuch a Complication of ſeveral Motives, and to Circumſtances ſo different, that it is not poſſible, it may be, to diſtinguiſh them rightly. 'Tis enough that they be true Prejudices; that is to ſay, haſty Concluſions, which

ſerve

ſerve 'em afterwards inſtead of a Princi-
ple.

Let us ſuppoſe, for example, that a Man born in any part of *Chriſtendom*, where very groſs Errors, as it happens but too often, are mix'd with the Doctrine of Jeſus Chriſt and his Apoſtles; let us ſuppoſe, I ſay, that this Man comes to diſcern theſe Errors by reading the Books of thoſe Divines who are of the contrary Party: He's preſently cur'd of the Prejudices of his Education; for he was always told that the Sentiments maintain'd in the Place of his Nativity were true. It may notwithſtanding fall out that a Perſon capable of diſcovering theſe Errors, cannot go back to the very Spring, and examine the Chriſtian Religion in it ſelf, ſuch as it is in the Writings of the Apoſtles. There he ſtops then, and imagines not only that the Religion of his Country is falſe, but he makes the ſame Concluſion concerning all Religions, without excepting that of the firſt Followers of Chriſt. He may entertain ſuch Thoughts a great while before he can find any body to whom he dares open his Mind, or that is able to undeceive him if he does: and theſe Thoughts may take ſuch deep Rooting at length, that it ſhall not be an eaſy Matter afterwards to eradicate them. If the Man too be any thing ſpeculative, he may in this Condition form other Principles, upon

on which he ſhall reaſon all his Life, tho they be in themſelves moſt falſe.

Theſe are the Prejudices from which, I ſaid, we muſt preſerve our ſelves, and that may contribute much to get the Chriſtian Religion rejected. All thoſe who are tainted with them, are not equally capable of expreſſing them clearly; and beſides, they dare not always declare them freely to thoſe with whom they diſcourſe upon the Subject; ſo that it is a moſt difficult Buſineſs to examine them in ſuch a manner as may turn to their Advantage.

Nevertheleſs, it may be ſaid in general of all Judgments made of a thing from Principles which are not certain, that if Men ſhould thus hit upon the Truth, it muſt be by pure Chance, and conſequently not to be rely'd upon. If this Rule is to be obſerv'd in the Search of all ſorts of Truth, how much more is it to be regarded in a Truth of ſo great Importance as Religion is granted by all to be?

This Rule then is grounded upon common Senſe, and no body can diſagree to it. Now let us apply it to a Prejudice very common amongſt thoſe who doubt of the Truth of Chriſtianity, or that plainly reject it. They cannot, they ſay, believe the Miracles upon which it is built, becauſe they never ſaw any Miracles, nor ever ſpoke to any Perſons worthy of Credit.

dit who assur'd 'em that he had seen the like. They cannot any better imagine that this Earth whereupon we live had a Beginning, or that ever there was a time when there were neither Animals nor Plants. The Reason of this is, because they have always remark'd in a manner the same state of things, and have never spoke to any that had seen this Beginning.

I maintain in the first place, that this is a mere Prejudice, which may be reduc'd to this general Maxim; *A Man cannot believe that whereof he has never seen any Examples, nor spoke to any Eye-witnesses worthy of Credit who could give a Relation of it.* We shall find that this is very far from a Geometrical Axiom, if we examine the Grounds of it. What has perswaded some People to a Belief of this Principle, is, That many times they discover'd Falshoods by its means. Some antient Philosophers, for Example, have confuted the Fables of the Poets concerning the Centaurs, the Giants, the Monster Chimera, and the like fictitious things, by this very Maxim, *What has been, now is; and shall be for the future.* I agree that this Axiom may be of use, when such as affirm unheard-of things deserve no Credit, as were the Poets, who own'd they had invented a great part of what they said. But I deny that it extends generally to all

Palephat. de reb. incredibil.

things, or that it can paſs for a ſelf-evident Maxim.

When a poſſible thing is atteſted by People in whom we ſee no appearance of Diſhoneſty or Fraud, this Maxim is of no uſe, altho we never ſaw any thing like that which we are told of, nor ever heard others ſpeak of it. Thoſe who firſt diſcover'd *America*, and ſpoke of the Plants or Animals they had found there, and which are Strangers to our Continent, were worthy of Credit, and deſerv'd to be believ'd, though we had never heard of the like before; nay though none had gone after them to *America*, and that we had not read their Voyages till a long time after their Deceaſe. It is manifeſt, that ſuch as ſhould count their Relations fabulous from this Principle, would fall themſelves into a very great Error, as Time has ſhewn. The ſame may be ſaid of what was declar'd by the firſt who affirm'd they had been with our Antipodes. What they ſaid was not the leſs true, becauſe till then it was not heard of; and had the Art of Navigation decay'd ſo much after their Return, that none had ſince undertaken the ſame Voyage, ſuch as ſhould now read their Travels could have no ſufficient Reaſons to disbelieve what they ſaid.

It is plain by theſe Examples, that this Maxim cannot paſs for a Mathematical Axiom,

Axiom, that admits of no Exception; and that conſequently nothing can be merely concluded from it without the Addition of other Proofs. If it be conſider'd in it ſelf, this will not be the more call'd in queſtion, ſeeing there is no body ſuch a Fool as to make his preſent Knowledg the Meaſure or Rule of True and Falſe in all Matters. Who can, without Extravagancy, flatter himſelf to have ſo extenſive a Knowledg of all poſſible things, as to pronounce that certainly falſe which is not contain'd in his own Stock of Knowledg? But it is not neceſſary to be more large in the Confutation of ſo ſtrange an Imagination.

Nevertheleſs the Incredulous ſuppoſe this, without perceiving it, as a Geometrical Principle; and from it conclude that what is ſaid, for Inſtance, of the Creation of the World, and of Miracles, is not true. Let them ſeriouſly conſider the Point, and they'll find that from a Prejudice ſo little reaſonable they draw Conſequences which they think clear as the Day. The good Opinion they conceive of themſelves and their Knowledg, join'd to Experience, which upon ſome occaſions does confirm this Maxim, makes them ſhut their Eyes upon this account, as I ſaid, without perceiving it.

I ſhall bring another Example of a Prejudice not better eſtabliſh'd than the for-

mer, and whereupon is grounded, notwithſtanding, a great part of the Reaſonings of Unbelievers. Some who have Senſe enough to quit the Opinions of their Youth which they drew from their Education, without knowing why, have not always Penetration and Exactneſs of Judgment enough to ſubſtitute any thing better in their room: Yet they cannot forbear ſearching out other Principles; for none can abſolutely ſtop there, as I could eaſily ſhew, were this the proper place of doing it.

As they are not ſatisfy'd with what they learn'd concerning God and Religion, ſo they form to themſelves new Ideas of them, which are little better than their former ones; but they pleaſe them more, becauſe they are the Fruits of their own Meditation, which never fail of delighting the Underſtanding that is their Parent. They imagine, for Example, That if there were a God, who had created Men, who would do 'em Good, and in order to it had reveal'd himſelf to them, he ought to have done it in this manner. Firſt, He ſhould (according to them) have made himſelf known to all Mankind, to render them equally happy, ſeeing he is their common Father. Secondly, This Revelation ſhould have begun from the Creation of the firſt Man, and ſo be continu'd throughout all the World, according as it was planted with

with Men; ſeeing it is not leſs neceſſary to ſuch as are born now, than to thoſe of the Ages paſt. Thirdly, It ſhould have been at the Beginning ſo clear, and deliver'd with Circumſtances ſo convincing, that none could doubt of the Senſe or Truth of the Revelation; and the Proofs of it ought to have ſtill ſubſiſted, that every one might examine them, without relying upon the Relation of another; otherwiſe, if there be any Revelation, it is uſeleſs, ſay they, as Experience ſhews. In the fourth place, This Law ſhould have been proportionated to the preſent State of Mankind, that ſo it might be obey'd; or elſe the Creator of Men ought to reform their Nature, to the end it ſhould not oppoſe it ſelf to the Obſervation of his Laws; without which, they ſignify almoſt nothing, and are unworthy a Wiſdom that knows the Condition of them to whom it preſcribes them; or of a bountiful Being who preſcribes them to Men, to render them more happy.

Theſe Principles appear ſpecious at firſt ſight, becauſe they ſeem to be built upon the high Idea we ought to have of the Divinity. And as the Incredulous think they ſee the quite contrary in what the Chriſtians ſay of Revelation, they hence conclude, that the Chriſtians are in an Error; and they imagine to prove it the better againſt them, in as much as they

build upon the ſame Suppoſitions with them concerning the Nature of God.

But I'm going to ſhew, that this way of reaſoning is grounded upon a Prejudice, which is manifeſtly falſe: for to come at the Propoſitions we now read, they muſt proceed by theſe Steps. 1. By reaſoning we may exactly know what ſhould be the Carriage of God towards Men, if there be a God, ſuch as he is deſcrib'd. 2. We do in effect form an exact and complete Idea of God, which is contain'd in the Propoſitions we have been reading. 3. And if the ſuppos'd Carriage of the Creator is not conformable to it, then there is no ſuch thing, and all that is ſaid of it is falſe. 4. We ſee, by the Hiſtory of times paſt, and by what we know of the preſent State of Mankind, that the very contrary has always happen'd to this day. 5. Therefore, *&c.*

Theſe are the Propoſitions which thoſe, I mention'd before, ſuppoſe; as all, who have any Idea of the right Method of Reaſoning, muſt grant. But the firſt of theſe Propoſitions is certainly falſe: for it is manifeſt that Revelation is not clear enough concerning the Deſigns of God with reſpect to Mankind in general, as that we might thence form an exact or complete Idea of his Carriage towards Men. And it is a thing not material for us to know; no body being oblig'd to learn

learn more than he ought to believe and do, in order to become acceptable to God, without troubling himself about the Methods of his Providence with relation to Mankind in general, nor yet about his secret Designs. To be a good Subject to a Prince, it is no ways needful to penetrate into all the Secrets of his Politicks and Designs; it is sufficient to know what the Laws of the State command him to perform. This is what *Moses* taught the *Israelites*, when he said to them, that *secret things belong'd to the Lord, but the things reveal'd to them and to their Children.* Deut. 29. 29.

The first Proposition being false, the second, which is a Consequence of it, cannot hold; and no Person, without an extravagant Presumption, can say that he has a perfect Idea of the Method whereby God ought to govern the World, if he would act conformable to the Vertues that are attributed to him. For indeed, although we have some Idea of these Attributes, it follows not that we conceive them in their whole Extent, or that we can exactly know what Carriage is most agreeable to them. We know, for Example, that God is most wise; that is to say, that this Sovereign Intelligence never acts, without proposing certain Ends worthy of himself, and that he goes to those Ends by the Ways he judges to be most proper, and that are effectually

ſo. But for all this, we know not, at leaſt in a diſtinct manner, every End which he has propos'd to himſelf, nor all the Ways whereby he deſigns to come at them. No body could ever boaſt of gathering this from either Revelation, or the Events that happen in the World. We know by Hiſtory, that ſome Princes have govern'd their Subjects with great Wiſdom; but who can value himſelf upon knowing all their particular Deſigns, and the Methods they have us'd to come at their Ends, only from their Writings or their Conduct? It muſt be confeſt then, that we may know ſomething of the Attributes of God, without being able to penetrate into all the Secrets of his Conduct; and common Senſe does teach us, that we ought not to judg raſhly thereof.

This being ſo, the third Propoſition cannot be look'd upon, but as the moſt preſumptuous and temerarious Imagination that could poſſibly be. It would be abſurd to reaſon thus concerning an earthly King, and boldly to affirm that he was guilty of ill Management becauſe he had not follow'd our Idea of the Conduct he ſhould obſerve, without our having an exact Knowledg of the State of his Affairs, nor of his Deſigns. And it is a thouſand times more abſurd ſo to judg of the Divine Underſtanding, infinitely exalted above ours; for we muſt remember, that

at Unbelievers reaſon upon this Occa-
on from the Principles of Revelation.

To come to the fourth Propoſition,
e cannot exactly judg of God's Provi-
nce towards Mankind during the Ages
ſt, by the Hiſtories we have. Few of
n are extant: but if we had all the
ſtories that ever were written, yet that
ould not be enough to form ſuch a Judg-
ent by. The exacteſt Hiſtories do ne-
ſſarily omit a world of things, and re-
te only the moſt conſiderable Events
hich regard States, rather than the Opi-
ons of Nations, or the Revelations they
ight receive from Heaven.

It muſt be granted then, that none can,
ithout extreme Raſhneſs, take upon
em to be Judges of Divine Providence;
to conclude that there is no God, be-
uſe he governs not the World after that
anner they think he ſhould. This An-
er might ſuffice to ſhew the Falſity of
oſe Prejudices which the Incredulous
rm againſt Revelation and Providence,
d which I have ſet down in this Chap-
r.

However, to ſhew fully the Danger of
eing impos'd upon by Prejudices of this
ature, I ſhall examine them as they are
themſelves, though I have already de-
roy'd their Foundation. I might, with-
ut any more ado, ſay concerning the firſt
ropoſition, That God had ſufficiently

made

made himself known to all Men, by revealing his Will to the first Patriarch from whom they are descended, to *Noah* for Example, and to his Children; and it is very probable, that the general Belief of a God, and the Service due to him has its Origin hence rather than from the Reasonings of any People. I might add likewise, That God having created Men free, and contenting himself with giving them Laws, they have abus'd their Liberty by violating his Commands, and so became unworthy that God should continue to make himself known to them, as perhaps he might have done, if they had made a better Use of the Favours he was pleas'd to heap upon them.

But I shall only say, That he might very well, without any way blemishing his Goodness, bestow more Favours upon some People than others. There is nothing so free as the Effects of Beneficence which are not due; and no body can reasonably complain that he has not receiv'd from such a Benefactor what he had given to others. On the contrary, he ought to be thankful that he gave him what he has, and which was no more due to him than what he has not. As there is a great Diversity amongst Creatures of several Kinds, some having more and some less Properties than others; and that all the while no Person maintains that God ought to

to have made all equally perfect, without putting any Difference between his Works: why might not God also be pleased to place some Variety in the same Species of Beings? Since we see that the Disposition of Humane Bodies does vary in a world of things, that their Understandings are not more of a piece, and since it is not thought strange that God has thus differently distributed his Gifts; why should it be accounted a wonderful thing that God has imparted more or less Light to the several Nations which compose Mankind? The greatest Difficulty in this matter, if I'm not mistaken, proceeds from this, that People, without perceiving it, confound God's Justice with his Beneficence; and withal they unreasonably suppose, that God requires an equal Return of Vertue from all Men, and that he will judg them all by the same Law. Upon this Supposition, it seems repugnant to the Attributes of God to expect as much from the *Cafers* of *Africa* or the Savages of *America*, as from more knowing People; and it is thought unjust that God should dispense his Gifts so diversly, since he would judg all Men upon the same foot.

But tho the Beneficence of God be, according to Revelation, perfectly free, insomuch that no Nation can complain that another is preferr'd to it; his Justice Rom. 9. 10, &c.

ſtice follows the ſame Rules that he has preſcrib'd to the Juſtice of Men. He gives to whom he will, and in what quantity he pleaſes, but he judges according to what he has beſtow'd. *He requireth not what he has not given, and he reapeth not where he has not ſow'd. Thoſe that ſin without the Law ſhall periſh without the Law; and thoſe that ſin under the Law ſhall be judg'd by the Law.*

Rom. 11. 23.

Mat. 12. 21.

Rom. 2. 12.

As for the ſecond Queſtion touching the continuance of Revelation, all the Difficulty is taken away by what is now ſaid. God will have all reaſonable Regard to every Circumſtance of thoſe People to whom he has ſo differently diſtributed his Favours. Revelation does teach us the contrary no where; and if any Chriſtian Doctors have added to the Doctrine of the Apoſtles, it is incumbent upon them to defend their own Opinions, and not upon thoſe who deſign only to defend the Chriſtian Religion. None can, without Injuſtice, impute to its Founders all that has been ſince built upon the Foundations they firſt laid, as it ſhall be made appear more at large in the ſecond Part of this Work.

The third Propoſition concerning the Evidence of the Proofs of Revelation, its perpetual Subſiſtence, and the Perſpicuity of its Expreſſions, does ſuppoſe, that the Deſign of God was to teach Men his Will mathe-

mathematically, which is a Suppoſition contrary to the preſent State of Mankind; a State of Liberty, wherein Laws and not Demonſtrations are propos'd to them. Suppoſing that God would appoint Rewards and Puniſhments, he could not lead Men to Vertue, nor avert them from Vice, otherwiſe than by Laws whereof the Senſe could not be more clear, and yet the Juſtice and Authority of them be never mathematically demonſtrated. If all Mankind were convinc'd of the Truth of Revelation, and of the Senſe of it, by mathematical Proofs, no body then could reſiſt it. There could be, conſequently, no Puniſhments for the guilty, becauſe none would be guilty; nor could there be any more Reward; for what Recompence can a Man expect for aſſenting to a mathematical Demonſtration?

It will be demanded, perhaps, why God ſhould govern Man after this manner, and not mathematically, as ſome Unbelievers would have him? But I'm not bound to account for God's Bounty, which he diverſifies as he pleaſes, for Reaſons unknown to us: 'Tis enough that I prove he cannot be accus'd of Injuſtice; and this, I'm perſwaded, I can perfectly demonſtrate.

To be ſhort, the Divine Laws are proportionated to the Nature of Man, whatever they may ſay who have not ſtudy'd them

them as they ought. 'Tis an undoubted Truth, agreed upon by all Chriſtian Divines, That God does not damn any Perſon barely for violating his Laws, but for not leaving his ill Habits, that being the Man's own Fault. I ſhall inſiſt no longer upon this, leſt I digreſs too far from the Subject I treat of in this Chapter.

What I conclude from all I have ſaid, is, That Unbelievers do frequently take ill-grounded Prejudices for clear Principles, from which they haſtily judg of the whole Chriſtian Religion. I have alledg'd plain Examples of it, and could have brought ſeveral more; but thoſe cited by me may ſuffice to make a reaſonable Man take care of paſſing ſuch precipitant Concluſions. This is all that I require in this place, and which the moſt incredulous Man living cannot, without extreme Folly, refuſe me. Now, I'm perſwaded if Unbelievers would take the pains to look back upon the firſt Propoſitions which they build upon, that they ſhould perceive a great part of them could by no means paſs for Axioms; and then they would quickly acknowledg how little Solidity was to be found in their other Principles.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

That many are Unbelievers, becauſe they know not how to reaſon rightly.

IN the preceding Chapters I ſuppos'd that Unbelievers did not reaſon well, and that, without perceiving it, they ſuffer'd themſelves to be ſeduc'd by their Paſſions or Prejudices; but I did at the ſame time ſuppoſe that they might be reclaim'd by Arguments, when they were ſhew'd that they follow'd not the Rules of Good Senſe. But there are more than one kind of Unbelievers; and ſome of them, thoſe I mean who are to be the Subject of this Chapter, are Unbelievers upon no other Account, but becauſe they cannot reaſon well, as I ſhall preſently demonſtrate.

But we muſt remark before, that, the Chriſtian Religion conſiſting in Doctrines and Matters of Fact, to prove both theſe we muſt make long Reaſonings, and alledg many Proofs depending upon one another. Thus to perceive the Force of thoſe Reaſons brought to prove the Divinity of the Chriſtian Religion, we muſt be capable not only of underſtanding every Propoſition or every Argument by it ſelf; but likewiſe to enter into the Diſcuſſion

cuſſion of all that is ſaid, by examining the Connection of the Reaſonings, and the Relations which a great number of Ideas have towards one another. But there are a world of People who entertain a good Opinion of themſelves, and are not capable, nevertheleſs, of this Examination nor to conſider diſtinctly ſo great a Collection of ſuch compounded and perplex'd Ideas.

I ſhall be immediately told, no doubt, That if this be ſo, I do but loſe my time in reaſoning with them; ſince I ſuppoſe that they are not capable to know the Solidity of an Argument. Yet two things oblige me to do it, whereof the firſt and principal is, that what I have to ſay upon this Subject may contribute to keep thoſe who are perſwaded of the Truth of Chriſtianity, from being ſeduc'd by the Example of this ſort of Unbelievers. An infinite number of People who believe the Chriſtian Religion true, know not the Proofs of it ſo perfectly, and are not ſo much confirm'd in their Belief, but that they may be tempted by the Example of thoſe Unbelievers who reaſon little. They are of all Qualities and Conditions; and the haughty Air whereby they reject Revelation, is not ſometimes leſs dangerous than the moſt ſpecious Sophiſtry.

In the ſecond place, It may happen that ſuch as are not Maſters of the true Me-

thod

thod of Reaſoning, may notwithſtanding be in a Condition of leaving their Ignorance, and of making a better Uſe of their Underſtandings. It is very fit to convince this ſort of People that they are only Unbelievers, becauſe they know not how to govern their Thoughts. But I grant that thoſe who are grown old in this kind of Ignorance, and whoſe Preſumption is encreas'd by their Age, are in a manner incurable, go to work with them how you will; eſpecially if any Immorality be join'd to this want of Judgment, which never fails ſcarcely to happen: Nor is it for ſuch that we write, as Books of Phyſick are not written about incurable Diſeaſes.

To be perſwaded our ſelves that there are, in effect, ſome People who for want of knowing how to reaſon refuſe their Aſſent to the Goſpel, we need only reflect a little upon the preſent State of the Heathens, and upon what we know of many Unbelievers which live among Chriſtians.

Such as undertake to convert the Indians, and the other Idolaters of *Aſia*, *America*, and *Africa*, after taking a great deal of pains to learn their Language, are forc'd to take much more when they would by reaſoning perſwade them of the Falſity of their Religions, and of the Truth of that of Jeſus Chriſt. The Monks may long enough make all imaginable Efforts

to become intelligible to thoſe ignorant People, and to convince them of the Abſurdity of their Idolatry, and the Opinions whereupon it is built; but although this thing be ſo plain, yet there are but few of them who can be made to underſtand it, and fewer that conceive the Reaſons upon which Chriſtianity is grounded.

'Tis not neceſſary that I ſpeak here of the Means which the Miſſionaries have choſen to employ in their Converſions, rather than Reaſon. This makes nothing to my Deſign. I ſhall only remark, that the Difficulty of bringing thoſe Idolatrous Nations to receive the Goſpel, proceeds not from any Infidelity peculiar to them from the People of *Europe*. They are, upon the contrary, the moſt credulous People in the World, and very ſeriouſly embrace a great number of incredible things, whereof their Theology is made up. Their Incredulity, with reſpect to the Goſpel, proceeds from their not reaſoning almoſt at all, except about things relating to Life; and that nothing ever enters into their Minds except from Experience or Education. They are not Men that meditate, and are capable of attentively conſidering abſtracted Ideas, nor of comparing them with one another, to draw ſome Conſequence from them. So for want of meeting a little reaſoning in theſe People, one is extremely

tremely puzzl'd how to get 'em to change their Opinions.

This cannot be ſaid of the Mahometans, ſince we know that their Divines do ſometimes write with Subtlety and Senſe enough againſt ſome of the Doctrines which the Miſſionaries would have 'em embrace. Nor can we treat them as Infidels that reject the Chriſtian Religion out of a Spirit of Scepticiſm; for they are every thing rather than *Pyrrhonians*, ſeeing they moſt heartily believe all the Alcoran. Nevertheleſs, altho they have Senſe enough (as I ſaid) to make Objections againſt ſome Doctrines that are preach'd to them, yet they have not enough to examine the Principles of their own Religion, and to ſee upon what it is grounded. They don't ſo much as underſtand what is ſaid to them upon that Head, nor the Reaſons brought to prove the Truth of Chriſtianity. And if the Miſſionaries now and then convert ſome of 'em, it is not from any Reaſons they alledg, but in gaining their Love and Eſteem by ſome other ways.

The Jews are much in the ſame Condition, as it may be ſeen by the Books they have written to eſtabliſh their own Opinions, or to confute thoſe of the Chriſtians. This may be eaſily diſcover'd alſo by any that diſcourſes with them upon theſe Subjects. But between them and

the Mahometans there is this Difference, that the latter give Credit to a Book full of Impertinencies and Falſhoods; whereas the Jews ground their Perſwaſion upon the Books of the Old Teſtament, which contain a true Revelation. And yet they can reaſon little better than the Mahometans; which is one of the greateſt Obſtacles to their Converſion. Whilſt they are ſatisfy'd with the mere Authority of ſome Rabbins, tho without any Foundation, they are Proof againſt the ſtrongeſt Reaſons the Chriſtians can oppoſe to 'em; becauſe from their Infancy they are wont to believe what their Rabbins tell them, and are never taught to reaſon juſtly.

Otherwiſe, if the Jews were in a Condition of purſuing an Argument, and of diſtinguiſhing a good from an ill Conſequence, it would then be very eaſy to convince them of the Truth of Chriſtianity. It ſhould be only needful, as ſome Chriſtian Divines have lately done, to put them upon proving the Truth of the Divine Miſſion of *Moſes*, as they would prove it to a Heathen they deſign'd to proſelyte to Judaiſm. For if they bring any ſolid Proofs for this matter, it may be eaſily made evident, that theſe ſame Reaſons are incomparably ſtronger in favour of the divine Miſſion of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, than in favour of that of *Moſes*; as it has been ſhewn in the Book whoſe Title

Title you may ſee in the Margin.

Limborch. Amica collat. cum Erudit. Judæo.

Now then, to convince the Jews and other Infidels by Reaſon, they muſt be firſt taught the Art of methodically digeſting their Thoughts, and be accuſtomed to reaſon ſtrictly upon other Heads, that they may learn to underſtand the Force of the Proofs upon which the Goſpel is founded. But this is what all the Miſſionaries in the World are not able to do, eſpecially to thoſe Infidels who are advanc'd in Years. It were Injuſtice to believe that 'tis only amongſt Infidels that Men are found uncapable of diſcerning the Goodneſs of an Argument; and who, upon this account, reject the Chriſtian Religion. There are Unbelievers among Chriſtians themſelves, who are not only ſuch out of ſome Diſpoſition engaging them againſt the Goſpel, but likewiſe out of downright Stupidity, and for want of underſtanding the Reaſons whereupon Chriſtianity is grounded.

There are ſome People who from their Childhood have been brought up to ſome Trade, or other conſtant Buſineſs, without any Care taken about the forming of their Minds, or even of inſtructing them in Religion; and who, being moreover of a Genius not very proper for conceiving of things reveal'd, tho haughty and preſumptuous, have grown to a full Age without any farther Inſtruction, or being cur'd

of their Pride. Theſe are rarely perſwaded of the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion; nay, they frequently reject it entirely, or at leaſt, in part: not only becauſe they know not the Proofs of it, but alſo becauſe they underſtand them not, when they hear them from thoſe that do know them. Theſe unpoliſh'd and ignorant Creatures imagine that there is nothing true, but what they perceive by their Senſes, or what they have found by their own Experience to be poſſible, or, in a word, what they find conformable to their Paſſions. Thus neither the ſpeculative Doctrines of Religion, nor the Practice of it, nor yet the Hiſtory of thoſe who taught it being within the Verge of their Knowledg, they refuſe to believe them rather out of Brutality and Stupidity, than as deceiv'd by captious Reaſonings. If they reject it not altogether, 'tis certain however that they retain only what is moſt pleaſing to them; which is an evident Demonſtration that they are not perſwaded of it from Reaſoning and Knowledg; becauſe the Proofs which confirm a part of it, are the ſame that ſhew the whole Religion to be true.

'Tis not only amongſt People taken up with Trade and Buſineſs that this ſort of Unbelievers is to be found; for there are more of 'em, perhaps, amongſt ſuch as aſpire to great Preferments, amongſt Soldiers,

diers, and Perſons of Quality. It may be ſaid indeed, that Perſons of theſe Ranks have had a better Education than others, with relation to the Affairs of the World, and thoſe Employments to which they were deſign'd: But in very truth, it is as common a thing to hear them reaſon as wretchedly about Religion, as the moſt ignorant among the Populace. When once they are grown old in their Prejudices againſt Chriſtianity, then their natural Vanity, encreas'd with their Age, renders them more obſtinate, and not ſeldom makes 'em altogether inacceſſible to Truth. You propoſe the moſt cogent Arguments to them in vain; for they look upon them as mere Sophiſms, tho they know not wherein Sophiſtry differs from ſolid Reaſoning.

I ſhall be told, perhaps, that this ſort of Men is not ſo ignorant of the Art of Thinking as I ſuppoſe them to be, ſeeing they reaſon not ſo ill concerning thoſe things they know by Experience, and that they govern themſelves with Prudence enough in the Affairs of Life. To this I anſwer, That I do not deny but thoſe, I ſpeak of, may reaſon very well about what are the Objects of their Paſſions, or when they confine themſelves within the Limits of their Experience. But I maintain, that they have not as much as the Notion of reaſoning ſolidly about ſpe-

culative things, that make no Impreſſions upon the Senſes; ſuch as are the Proofs whereupon the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion is built.

To be convinc'd of this, we need only examine them, if we can, upon theſe two Heads. Firſt, We muſt diſcourſe 'em about ſome abſtracted Subject; ſuch as are, for Example, the general Ideas of moſt things, the Notions of Vertues and Vices: And if they reaſon exactly herein, we may juſtly conclude, that theſe Perſons are not of their number who continue Unbelievers, for want of knowing how to reaſon rightly. But if we hear them talk of ſuch Matters without any Principles or Coherence, if we ſee that they do not comprehend what is ſaid to them upon ſuch Occaſions, be it never ſo clear, or notwithſtanding all the Pains taken to make it plain, (which happens but too frequently) then it will be eaſily granted me, that their Infidelity does, at leaſt, proceed in part from their Ignorance of the Art of Reaſoning.

Another way we have to diſcover this kind of Unbelievers, is, when we find them diſtaſted with all Diſcourſes upon abſtracted Matters, or with any thing that relates not to their Paſſions; when they avoid the reading of all Books requiring any Attention, eſpecially of ſuch Books as are written to prove the Truth of what they

they disbelieve; finally, when they won't enter upon a Diſcuſſion of any ſuch Subjects, nor will be at the Pains of comparing the Anſwers of Believers with the Objections of the Incredulous. We may ſufficiently know ſuch Perſons, who are, ſo to ſpeak, ſo fill'd with what they have learn'd from Experience of the Affairs of the World, that nothing elſe can enter into them, and are diſpleas'd when they hear other Diſcourſes.

Such was *Feſtus*, for Inſtance, the Governour of *Judea*, who is mention'd in the *Acts of the Apoſtles*. He could ſcarcely hear a ſhort Diſcourſe from St. *Paul*, and charg'd him with Madneſs, after hearing from him another Diſcourſe full of Evidence and good Senſe. Were he told of ſome Methods how to ſqueeze Money dexterouſly out of his Province, or were he acquainted with ſome Intrigue that might contribute to prefer him to a more conſiderable Poſt, he would immediately underſtand what was ſaid to him; or he would get it repeated to him ſo often, and would have ask'd ſo many Queſtions about it, that he ſhould at leaſt have an exact Notion of the Buſineſs. But becauſe S. *Paul* ſpoke to him of things no way relating to his Deſigns or Paſſions, he could ſcarce patiently hear him, and underſtood nothing of his Diſcourſe.

There

There are a world of People at this day in the midſt of Chriſtendom, who are very near in the ſame Diſpoſition. They ſpeak very well of their Temporal Affairs, or any thing belonging to them; they willingly converſe about the News of the Times, and that ſometimes with Senſe enough; but put them once by ſuch things to talk of Religion, they are preſently tir'd, they ſpeak of it ridiculouſly, they ſhew, in a word, ſo great a Contempt of ſuch Diſcourſes, as if they were Matters beneath them, and to which they cannot ſtoop without Uneaſineſs.

As theſe Unbelievers, who reaſon not at all, are moreover entirely poſſeſt with Paſſions oppoſite to the Goſpel, and have been long habituated to obey them; ſo they are not acceſſible on any ſide, and I ſee not how, without a Miracle, they can be convinc'd of their miſerable State, nor reclaim'd from their Error. However it was fit to make ſome Reflections upon this ſort of Unbelievers, that we might not be impos'd upon when we meet with ſuch, nor ſeduc'd by their Ways.

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

That the Neglect of ſearching into Truth is often the Cauſe of Incredulity.

THere are many Men who have naturally a Genius good enough for abſtracted Matters, and that alſo were not wholly neglected in their firſt Education; but whom the Courſe of their Lives has engag'd in Occupations which have no Affinity with the Search of Truth. The Neceſſaries of their Families, or the Deſire of ſatisfying their Paſſions, do ſo take up their Minds for ſeveral Years together, that they neglect all other things, never improve their natural Parts, nor diſtinguiſh Truth from Falſhood, with any Application, in the Buſineſs of Religion. This Negligence leads 'em inſenſibly into Doubting; for if the Connection of religious Truths be not heedfully attended to, there ariſe a thouſand Difficulties in the Mind, out of which we know not how to extricate our ſelves. From Doubt Men eaſily fall into Infidelity, whilſt they neglect the Search of what may remove their Scruples: for when once they are got into the Underſtanding, they are in motion upon all occaſions; and as the Solutions to them

them are not ſtudy'd after at the beginning, we ſhould not wonder if in time they take ſuch deep rooting, as it ſhall not be an eaſy Matter afterwards to extirpate them.

If ſuch as refuſe to believe the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion ſeriouſly examine themſelves, I am much miſtaken if the greateſt Part of 'em won't confeſs that they have extremely neglected the Care they ought to have us'd, in order to be inform'd of a thing of ſuch Importance. Nay, I dare affirm that there is not any Unbeliever who perceives not, if he minds it, that this Negligence is one of the principal Cauſes of his Incredulity: and I ſhall bring many Proofs of it in the Sequel of this Work.

Now, to make what I have ſaid more evident, I will inſtance this Fault in other Perſons, where People may remark it more impartially than in themſelves. When Chriſtianity begun to make a Noiſe in *Judea*, that is, chiefly when the Apoſtles declar'd every where the Reſurrection of their Maſter, and ſhew'd that he wanted not faithful Diſciples on Earth, tho he was himſelf no more there; all the *Jews* ought, one would think, to have inform'd themſelves of what theſe Diſciples ſaid, ſeeing they were things moſt nearly concerning them to know. They expected their *Meſſias* about that time; they

they groan'd so heavily under the *Roman* Tyranny, that they wish'd for nothing so much as Liberty, and they hop'd the *Messias* should prove their Deliverer. In this Disposition they ought to hearken, I should think, to every one that spoke to 'em of a Messias, to get rid of their Doubt, whether the wish'd Deliverer was yet come or not. Methinks too the Apostles should have been heard of all the World, when they preach'd the Doctrine and the Miracles of their Master, especially his Resurrection; for indeed these Miracles were so great and many, that more could not be expected from the *Messias*. The Disciples of the Apostles said in all Places, that not only *Jesus* of *Nazareth*, whom the Jews had crucify'd, did work numberless Miracles whilst he dwelt among Men; but that he also left the same Power to his Apostles, and that, in effect, they wrought Miracles every Day. What could be said more to excite the Curiosity of the Jews? They were not in the Judgment of the *Epicureans*, who thought no Miracles were to be wrought; nor did they believe that God would send them no more Prophets to work any: on the contrary, they expected the *Messias* the greatest of all the Prophets. And notwithstanding, they gave so little heed to what the Apostles said, that the Chief of their Nation never took notice of 'em, unless it was to

use

uſe 'em ill, without examining in the leaſt the Ground of their Doctrine. We have two Jewiſh Authors who liv'd in the time of the Apoſtles, namely, *Philo* and *Joſeph*; but nevertheleſs they did not vouchſafe to inform themſelves about theſe Matters, as may be ſeen by their Writings. *Philo* wrote a great many Books, whereof the moſt part are allegorical Diſcourſes upon the Old Teſtament: now in ſome of theſe he had a thouſand Occaſions to mention the Goſpel, if he had any Idea of it. If he disbeliev'd the Truth of it, he ſhould, at leaſt, have endeavour'd to confute it ſomewhere: but he ſays not a word for or againſt it, which is ſign enough that he knew not what it was. I know very well how *Euſebius* *, and ſome learned Men after him, pretended that the *Therapeutes* of *Alexandria*, whoſe Encomium is written by *Philo* in one of his Pieces, were Chriſtians. But nothing, except a deſire of confounding the Jews by their own Authors, could diſcover Chriſtians to *Euſebius*, and thoſe that followed him, in the Deſcription of the *Therapeutes*, where one Syllable is not ſpoken of Jeſus Chriſt, nor of his Doctrine; and where all that *Philo* ſays

* Hiſt. Eccleſiaſt. l. 2. c. 17. *See* Joſ. Scaliger, l. 7. de Emendat. Temp. Valeſius *upon* Euſebius, *and* Thomas Brown *in his Diſſertation concerning the* Therapeutes.

ſays does perfectly quadrate to ſome of the *Eſſeans*, who form'd, as 'tis well known, a particular Sect among the Jews. The Deſire of convincing Infidels ſhould not induce us to make uſe of weak Proofs againſt them; for certainly ſuch Methods muſt needs render 'em more averſe to Chriſtianity.

What I have now ſaid will be eaſily granted me by Men of any tolerable Reading or Judgment: But it may be diſputed with reſpect to † *Joſeph*, by reaſon of a Paſſage or two produc'd out of him, wherein he ſpeaks of Jeſus Chriſt. This is not the Place to examine theſe Paſſages, which learned Men ‖ believe were inſerted by ſome Chriſtian into the Text of *Joſeph*. But be this as it will, 'tis manifeſt that *Joſeph* ſays nothing of the Slaughter of the Children whereof St. *Matthew* ſpeaks, nor of moſt part of the Circumſtances of the Life of Chriſt, nor of his Doctrine; nor can he be ſuppos'd by any to have been acquainted with Chriſtianity, except by ſuch as never read his Works. Had he known a part of the Diſcourſes and Miracles of Jeſus Chriſt, he would not have been content to mention him only *en paſſant*, and in ſo few Words; he would be large upon that Subject, no doubt, as it well deſerv'd. It may be therefore poſitively affirm'd, that *Joſeph*, how exact ſoever reputed to be in other Mattters, did

† Antiq. Jud. l. 18. c. 4, & 8.

‖ *See* Le Fevre *in his Critical Letters.*

did ſhamefully neglect informing himſelf about the Chriſtian Religion, altho nothing could have been more eaſy for him. Nor can any Excuſe be pleaded on the behalf of the Heathens who liv'd at that time, or a little after; and that notwithſtanding their Acquaintance with ſome Chriſtians, yet never deſir'd to know what Chriſtianity it ſelf was. * *Tacitus*, † *Plinius*, and ‖ *Suetonius*, have ſpoken of it, and wanted not Opportunities to underſtand it, tho it appears they did not. They were polite and learned Men, and had ſpent, according to the Cuſtom of thoſe Ages, a great deal of time in the Study of the Greek Philoſophy. Now this Philoſophy was not upon any account comparable to the Doctrine or Morals of the Goſpel; nor could the Learned of *Rome* neglect theſe things only becauſe *Barbarians*, as the Grecians ſpoke, had declar'd them; for they well knew that the moſt famous Sages of *Greece* had undertaken long Voyages to the *Barbarians*, to learn their Opinions. What made them contemn the Chriſtians then? We need not ſeek for any other Reaſon, but a ſcandalous Neglect, proceeding from the predominant Paſſion of moſt People: for ordinarily they apply themſelves only to what is eſteem'd in the World, and that may contribute to have them taken notice of in the Places of their Abode. The Literature

* Annal. l. 15. c. 44.
† Ep. l. 10.
‖ In Claud. c. 25.

ture and Philoſophy of the * Greeks were for a long time in great Repute at *Rome*, and Perſons of the firſt Quality did value themſelves upon theſe ſorts of Knowledg: but the Goſpel was unknown there, becauſe it contain'd not any Doctrine proper to add more Luſtre to ſuch as did aſpire to the greateſt Dignities.

* *See the Preface of* Diogen. Laertius.

Something of this Nature made the Athenians neglect the Opportunity they had in their Hands of underſtanding the Goſpel, when St. *Paul* was in their City to preach it, if they would hear him: and, queſtionleſs, they would have heard him, had they as much good Senſe as they had Vanity. At the very firſt they call'd him a *Babler*; and after liſtening a while to him about the Reſurrection of the Dead, ſome of 'em laugh'd at him, others put him off till ſome other time, and there were but a ſmall Number of them that receiv'd the Doctrine which he preach'd to them. This proceeded in part from a blameable Neglect that would not let them inform themſelves throughly about what St. *Paul* declar'd, altho on the other ſide, the Athenians, and the Strangers who follow'd their Studies there, were Men of much Leiſure, and great Lovers of News. [Ver. 21.] But the Apoſtle not teaching his Doctrine after the manner of the Philoſophers they were wont to hear, whether in regard of the Method or the Elocution,

Acts 17. 18, 22.

they were out of Conceit with his Diſcourſes.

Let us ſuppoſe with them, that the outward Appearance of S. *Paul* was not ſo taking as that of their Philoſophers; but, ſhould this extinguiſh their Curioſity? Is Truth always neceſſarily accompanied with Eloquence? None of them durſt maintain ſuch a thing. Notwithſtanding, S. *Paul*'s being there did 'em no good; and they neglected acquainting themſelves with his Doctrine, which was infinitely more reaſonable than that of their Philoſophers. They loſt a world of time in the Study of very ridiculous Doctrines, as were the Phyſicks of all their Philoſophers, without excepting any; and the Morals of the greateſt part, to ſpeak nothing of their Dialectick or Logicks. There was not one Philoſopher who had any reaſonable, no nor a probable Hypotheſis concerning God, except the Platoniſts, who accommodated their Opinions ſo much to vulgar Notions, that by this Medley of Good and Bad, they render'd all the Good they ſpoke unprofitable and fruitleſs. Notwithſtanding, ſuch as ſpent all their time to hear this ſort of People, did not vouchſafe, out of an unpardonable Negligence, to underſtand what S. *Paul* ſaid to them.

One would think no body could at this time of day be guilty of the like Fault among Chriſtians, ſince they generally pro-

profeſs to believe that none can better ſpend his time than in diſcovering the Principles upon which Chriſtianity is grounded. But the Actions of Chriſtians not being always conformable to their Belief, it happens but too frequently, that their Courſe of Life produces an Effect quite contrary to what the Chriſtian Profeſſion ſhould beget in them. Altho it be not ſaid by any, that it were better employing himſelf about any thing elſe than in the Study of the Chriſtian Religion; yet the Carriage of moſt Men is commonly ſuch, as if they believed this. A Man who entirely neglects this Study, but duly makes his Court to thoſe that can advance him, or keep him in his preſent Poſt; a Man that paſſes all his Life in heaping up Riches, tho he be in a profound Ignorance about the Grounds of Chriſtianity; this Man, I ſay, is he for all this the leſs eſteemed? The moſt underſtanding Perſon in the World, but who is not reſpected for his Preferments, nor conſider'd for his Riches, is he comparable to this other ignorant, but rich or honourable Man? Not at all, according to the conſtant Practice of moſt Chriſtians. This Practice cries much louder, if we may ſpeak ſo, than the Evangelical Maxims it contradicts, and ſeems to ſay to thoſe who are entring into the World, that it concerns 'em little to learn the Reaſons

of aſſenting to Chriſtianity, but that it is of great Importance to obtain ſome Employment, or to enrich themſelves, to which this ſame Chriſtianity contributes nothing. It falls out likewiſe but too often, that this dangerous Leſſon is confirm'd by the Example of many conſiderable Perſons, who after neglecting the Study of Religion as much as they cultivate the Art of Advancing themſelves in the World, or of making their Fortune, are nevertheleſs in great Eſteem, and in ſuch advantageous Poſts, that their Lot appears worthy of Envy; whilſt ſuch as might inform others by their Knowledg, live in Contempt and Obſcurity.

This general Cuſtom which obtains almoſt every where, does throw People into a Neglect of Religion ſo much the more eaſily as they find themſelves diſpos'd not to obſerve the Precepts of it. Thus ſlighting that Science which ſignifies nothing as to their worldly Affairs, and whoſe Conſequences would engage them to reſiſt thoſe Paſſions to which they willingly abandon themſelves, they think as little as poſſibly they can upon thoſe Proofs which perſwade us of the Truth of the Goſpel. After this it happens, that ſome occaſion of Doubt comes into their Mind which begets Difficulties, out of which they cannot extricate themſelves for want of Knowledg; and this at laſt produces

produces a formal Infidelity, which is not eaſily to be cur'd, eſpecially if it be of any Continuance.

'Tis by ſo much the more dangerous to fall into this Negligence I'm treating of, as the Cauſes whence it ſprings are always in being, and act inceſſantly upon the Underſtanding with a great deal of force; whilſt that which might incline People to be inſtructed in the Reaſons of believing the Goſpel acts but weakly, and is ſtifl'd, as it were, every moment by the Example of the more numerous Party.

But there is likewiſe another thing, that may greatly contribute in ſeducing ſuch as are otherwiſe Men of good Senſe. 'Tis an Argument they frame without perceiving it, and which at firſt ſight appears ſolid enough. When they ſee that thoſe who make a Profeſſion of believing the Chriſtian Religion true, obey nothing of it but juſt as much as their worldly Intereſt obliges them to do; they imagine that moſt Men act a part only, and pretend to believe what they really do not; or elſe they conclude, that Perſons ſo injudicious as to contradict their Belief upon all occaſions, are but an ill Example to follow in this reſpect, and that it were better done of Men to regulate their Perſwaſion by their Conduct; ſeeing, as they ſuppoſe, they cannot change the latter. Thus they imitate pretty well the Actions of the

greateſt part of the World, but they believe themſelves exalted above the Multitude, in as much, at leaſt, as they have Principles conformable to their Practice. If they neglect informing themſelves in Religion, this proceeds from their not believing the Truth of it; and if they regulate not their Manners according to its Precepts, 'tis becauſe they give no Credit to the Recompences promis'd thoſe who ſhall obſerve them, nor to the Pains wherewith they are menac'd that violate them. In a word, they act coherently; whereas the Life of others is a perpetual Contradiction.

Nevertheleſs, it is moſt certain, that they are hugely out in their Judgment of the greateſt part of Chriſtians. 'Tis not true, that the Multitude feigns only to believe the Truth of Chriſtianity; and 'tis alſo falſe, that Injudiciouſneſs makes them contradict their Belief by their Practice. 'Tis much better to preſerve our Perſwaſion entire, even when we contradict it by our Actions, than to ſute the Doctrines of it to the Conduct we follow.

And I prove it thus. In the firſt place, a Man may ſincerely believe a Principle to be good and reaſonable, and yet not order his Life accordingly. The Reaſon hereof is, that what ſets moſt Mens Actions a going, is not ſo much the Light of the Underſtanding as the Diſpoſition of the

the Heart, and the Paſſions, which are not ſeldom entirely repugnant to this Knowledg. No body, for Example, will deny but that Bribery ought to have no place in a well-govern'd State, and that all Employments ſhould be conferr'd upon thoſe only who deſerve 'em; nay, the Laws do every where condemn Bribery. Nevertheleſs there are few Perſons that do not ſollicit for themſelves or for their Friends when any opportunity of Advancement offers it ſelf. We find alſo, that Men are agreed about the Uſefulneſs and Excellency of a great number of Laws, which they break nevertheleſs every day, when they reap any preſent Advantage from it. We may alledg a more evident Example of this Contradiction between our Underſtanding and Practice. A gouty Man who contracted this troubleſome Diſtemper by drinking too much Wine, doubts not in the leaſt, but that the immoderate Uſe of this Liquor muſt needs prove very hurtful to him; notwithſtanding, the preſent Pleaſure he finds in drinking carries it, and he cannot forbear drinking more than he ſhould. And thus it is with ſeveral other Paſſions. In like manner, People whoſe Deſires are contrary to the Spirit of the Goſpel, may indulge thoſe Deſires, without calling into queſtion all the while the Truth of Chriſtianity.

In the ſecond place, the Manners of moſt Chriſtians are contrary to their Perſwaſion, not that they perceive not this Oppoſition well enough, and condemn it too, when they think of it; but the Method of Living generally receiv'd, and that's moſt agreeable to their Paſſions, carries it over the Judgment they make of themſelves in their own Conſciences; and we may be convinc'd of it by the Examples already alledg'd, and by thouſands of the like nature.

In ſhort, It cannot be hence concluded that we muſt judg of Religion according to our Inclinations, nor that we may accommodate it rather to our manner of living, than continue to believe what we do not obey. Who will maintain that a Prince would do better in changing the Laws according to his preſent Paſſions, than to let them ſubſiſt, and break 'em every hour? No body. For if he obſerves not the Laws as he ſhould, he leaves them their Authority however with reſpect to his Subjects, and ſuch other Princes as are willing to obſerve them; which is of abſolute Neceſſity to Society. What Diſorders would it cauſe in the Commonwealth, if an adulterous Prince, leſt he ſhould be thought to contemn their Authority, would abrogate all thoſe Laws prohibiting Adultery? 'Tis ſaid that *Cambyſes* the Son of *Cyrus*, being in Love with his Siſter,

Herodot. l. 3. c. 31.

Siſter, and deſirous of marrying her, enquir'd of the Royal Judges, who were the Interpreters of the Laws amongſt the *Perſians*, whether it was lawful for a Brother to have his Siſter to Wife? They anſwer'd him, That there was no Law which permitted it; but that there was another Law that permitted the Kings of *Perſia* to do whatever they pleas'd. Upon this Anſwer, *Cambyſes* marry'd his Siſter; and the *Perſians* have not from that time ſcrupl'd to imitate their King in this Practice. It had queſtionleſs been leſs criminal, and much leſs hurtful to the Society, if *Cambyſes* had marry'd his Siſter without ſaying any thing of it, and not endeavour to cover his Inceſt by Authority of Law.

If it be ask'd then, Which Carriage is moſt dangerous and blameable, that of ſuch as violate the Laws of the Goſpel whom they believe to be Divine, or that of the Incredulous who reject the Divinity of theſe Laws becauſe they have no mind to obey them. 'Tis plain, that the latter is much worſe than the former, ſuppoſing the Laws of the Goſpel to be beneficial to Society, which cannot be doubted, as I have ſhewn in the firſt Chapter.

So, whatever be the Conduct of thoſe who profeſs the Chriſtian Religion, Unbelievers cannot however excuſe themſelves

ſelves becauſe others do not act coherently, ſeeing they neglect to underſtand what imports them moſt to know. The greateſt part of Chriſtians are doubtleſs in the wrong herein, and they deny it not themſelves; but the Incredulous are much more to blame than they. If the latter would examine themſelves, they might diſcover, perhaps, ſome other Source of this Negligence in their own Perſons; and it is, that generally they are not very ſollicitous about knowing the Truth in Matters of Religion.

There are ſome People ſo much taken up with the preſent, and having ſo good an Opinion of themſelves, that they ſhut their Eyes and Ears to all ſorts of Diſcourſe or Examples, which might convince them that they have reaſon not to be well ſatisfy'd with their Opinions and Practice. Altho they ſeem ſometimes to love the Truth, yet, if it be well remark'd, it will appear that they love nothing but their Paſſions, and are careful only how to indulge theſe; for they receive no more of the Truth, but what is not incompatible with their Deſires. Thus Princes, and Perſons of great Quality, cannot bear that ſuch as are about them ſhould ingenuouſly acquaint them with what is ſaid of them, and tell beſides their own Thoughts of the Matter. If any is a little too ſincere, he's quickly baniſh'd from their Preſence. 'Tis juſt

uſt ſo with many private Perſons, who ake none for their Friends but ſuch as latter them, and help to keep them up in he good Opinion they have conceiv'd of themſelves. Princes and private Men do equally drive out of their Minds all Thoughts that might trouble their Repoſe, and hinder them from quietly enjoying what they love. They cannot ſay therefore, that they are ſuch mighty Lovers of Truth, who care for knowing no more of it than what is pleaſing to them. And it may probably happen that many Unbelievers deal after this manner with Religion, neglecting to underſtand what might convince them, out of a ſecret Averſeneſs they have of ſearching into ſuch Truths as they cannot diſcover without extremely diſquieting themſelves. So S. *Paul* reaſoning before *Felix*, of Juſtice, Temperance, and future Judgment, this trembling Governour was quickly weary of hearing him, and put him off till another time. Had S. *Paul* entertain'd him with ſome other Diſcourſe, he would have heard him, it may be, as long as he pleas'd: but the Vertues whereof this Apoſtle began to ſpeak to him, were too oppoſite to his Manners to obtain a longer Audience from him. 'Tis evident then, that this Diſpoſition is entirely againſt all good Senſe, and the whole World does equally blame Flattery and Flatterers. 'Tis generally Acts 24. 25.

nerally agreed upon likewiſe, that there is nothing more remote from Wiſdom, than wilfully to continue ignorant of what is diſadvantageous to us; for without knowing it, we can never bring a Remedy againſt it, and our Ignorance about it changes not the Nature of the thing, but contributes not ſeldom to render our Condition worſe. The Incredulous therefore ought to look to it, and not fear to hazard their Repoſe in the Search of diſquieting Truths. They ought to beware of that ill regulated Self-love, which flatters our preſent Paſſions, and avoids every thing that may mix ſome Bitterneſs with the Sweetneſs we taſte in the Enjoyment of them. For my part, I'm perſwaded that their Negligence of informing themſelves about the Grounds of Chriſtianity, proceeds in great part from this dangerous Diſpoſition; and they would agree to it, no doubt, were they capable of examining themſelves.

Did we ſee Unbelievers uſe much Application in the Search of Truth, without omitting any thing that was neceſſary for their thorough Information, and yet not quit their Infidelity; we ſhould, perhaps, be tempted to believe that they were in the right, ſeeing they did not conclude but after a long and requiſite Diſcuſſion. But we ſee not one of them ſo diſpos'd, and they are all contented with a very ſuperficial

perficial Knowledg of Religion, without endeavouring to penetrate into the Proofs of it; which gives us occasion to confirm our selves in the Belief of the Truth, and to be perswaded that their Infidelity proceeds, as I have prov'd, from their Neglect of due Instruction.

CHAP. VI.

That Lazineſs may keep many People in Ignorance, Doubts, and Incredulity.

WE may reduce those who make Profession of believing Christianity, to two Orders of Men. Some embrace it rather from the Authority of such as they esteem, than for having examin'd the Proofs of it; and we may venture to say, that these are the greater number. There are, however, many understanding Persons, who believe the Truth of the Gospel for no other Reason, but because, after examining the Proofs of it, they have been fully convinc'd. We may also divide Unbelievers into two Parties. The one have in some sort examin'd the Reasons upon which Christians build their Belief, but have not judg'd them worthy of Assent, either because they knew not how to examine them

them as they ought, or for ſome other Reaſon which I will not ſtay to examine now. The other ſort have never troubled themſelves about examining them, and yet they ſtick not to pronounce our Proofs not convincing. They might be led to this haſty Judgment by divers Motives; or ſeveral Paſſions might contribute together to throw 'em into Infidelity. 'Tis not neceſſary that I enter upon a nice Diſcuſſion of theſe Motives and Paſſions. What I have ſaid in general or particular in the foregoing Chapters, may ſuffice to oblige Unbelievers to retire, as it were, into themſelves, and to preſerve them from the Deluſions of Self-Love. I muſt nevertheleſs add here ſome Remarks upon one of the particular Sources of Incredulity, which is but too common, and whereof I have not yet ſpoken any thing.

This Source is Lazineſs, which occaſions many People to remove out of their Minds whatever demands Attention, and that makes no Impreſſion upon them by their Senſes, or by their Paſſions. We meet with ſome who have Underſtanding and Judgment enough to examine rightly the Proofs of Chriſtianity, if they would apply themſelves to it. But the long Habit they have acquir'd of not examining any of theſe abſtracted Ideas which require ſome Application, makes them ſo averſe to this Examen, that it is not poſſible

ſible to perſwade them to it, whilſt they remain in this Diſpoſition.

To conquer it, if this can be, and to cure thoſe who indulge themſelves in it; or to keep others, at leaſt, from falling into it, we muſt examine it in its Riſe, Progreſs, and Conſequences: for if we can ſhew that it is the moſt unreaſonable thing in the World in it ſelf, and in its Conſequences the moſt dangerous, it muſt be neceſſarily granted, that it is not becoming a Man of good Senſe to give way to it.

In the preſent State of humane Nature, it is certain that nothing can more quickly excite our Attention than what ſtrikes our Senſes, or awakens ſome of our Paſſions. Whatever is convey'd into the Mind by either of theſe ways, does ſo move and occupy it, that if the Senſations be lively, and the Paſſions quick, no other thing can enter whilſt they act there. And Men have naturally an Averſion to all things beſides; for if a Man continues long in this Diſpoſition without making any Attempt to ſubdue it, it happens at laſt, that tho he be extremely active with regard to ſenſible things, and thoſe Paſſions to which he has given up himſelf; he falls nevertheleſs into a ſurprizing Lazineſs as to all other Matters, and will not hear of reading or examining any thing that has no relation to them. As the Lazineſs

Lazineſs of the Body proceeds from ſuch an extreme Love to the Pleaſure of that Repoſe to which we are accuſtom'd, that we cannot think of loſing it without trouble; ſo the Lazineſs of the Mind, which I'm now treating of, does ſo ſeize upon all thoſe who entertain it, that they cannot ſhake it off without great Pains and Moleſtation.

Were we aſſur'd that nothing merited our Attention, but what made Impreſſion upon our Senſes, or related to our Paſſions, we ſhould then give up our ſelves to this pleaſing Lazineſs, and live, with reſpect to ſpiritual Objects, in the ſame Calm, wherein we live with regard to whatever we think can neither hurt nor benefit us. It were a Folly to part with a State full of Pleaſure, only to diſquiet our ſelves in examining what would occaſion Pain, but procure us no Advantage. But on the other hand, if our Negligence of thoſe things, which no way concern the Senſes, ſhould occaſion us infinitely more Harm, than our Lazineſs about them could procure us of Pleaſure; it muſt be granted, that it were downright Madneſs for us to live in this Careleſſneſs. But we cannot aſſure our ſelves that there is nothing to be fear'd, ſhould we neglect ſpiritual things, ſuch as the Chriſtian Religion ſpeaks to us of, without examining the Reaſons upon which this Religion is grounded;

grounded; and consequently, we must necessarily conquer this Lazineſs, that keeps us from doing it; or else prefer the Quiet of a Fool, grounded only upon his Stupidity, to the true Knowledg of the State wherein we are, and of what we have to fear or hope.

Notwithstanding, those who once abandon themselves to this Lazineſs, which hinders them from any Examination of the Principles of Religion, have the hardeſt Task in the World to reclaim themselves; some of them, whereof we speak nothing in this place, chuse rather to believe whatever is told them of Religion, than to be at the pains of examining it; and others again will believe nothing of it, because they are resolv'd not to examine any thing of that nature. 'Tis of these last that we have undertaken to treat, and of whom it may be said, that how understanding soever they seem'd to be before they took up this careleſs way of living, they are afterwards very difficultly brought off from it. *Subit quippe etiam ipſius inertiæ dulcedo, & inviſa primò deſidia poſtremò amatur.* "The Pleasure of Lazi-"neſs gets into the Soul, and at last we "love that Idleneſs which at first we "hated." Tacit. in Agricol. c. 3.

He acts plainly against good Sense, who condemns what he has never well examin'd, because he had not Resolution

enough to undergo the Trouble of examining it; and he breaks the Rules of Common Prudence who obſtinately lives in this Condition, when the Queſtion is about a Matter of ſuch great Importance as Religion. If he acted thus in relation to any other thing, that is, if he took Sides without being at the pains of examining, who could he get to approve his Conduct? None ſurely; unleſs he had to do with Men void of common Senſe; ſince it cannot be deny'd, but this is viſibly expoſing himſelf to be deceiv'd, and to all the Conſequences of the Error he might fall into.

Let's ſuppoſe for a moment with Unbelievers, that the Chriſtian Religion is not true, altho this cannot be known, till it be firſt examin'd; but what Risk do they run in hearing the Reaſons of the Chriſtians? None at all; ſince if what they affirm be not concluſive, nothing can hinder them from rejecting it. All the Loſs they can fear is only the want of a little Quiet, whereof they deprive themſelves for ſome ſmall time. But methinks a ſhort term of Careleſſneſs ought not to be of ſo great value with a Man, that nothing can be capable of making him quit it. Is there any in the World who can live in this eternal Indifference for all that requires Application? If any leaves this Lazineſs for other things, what Reaſon can he bring

bring for not quitting it in order to discover his own state as to Religion? If indeed, after taking much pains to no purpose, a Man could not enjoy his former Quiet, he might plead very plausibly in Defence of this Carriage; but, on the contrary, after fatiguing himself a little, his Repose is but the more pleasant. And so the Lazy should by this Principle, at least, be at the trouble of examining Religion.

But now if the Christian Religion be certainly true, as we maintain, a more deplorable State could not well be conceiv'd in this Life than that of the lazy Gentlemen we have describ'd: For what can be imagin'd more lamentable, than to precipitate ones self into eternal Misery, rather than take the pains of learning the Means to avoid it? That Man could not be look'd upon as a lazy Person who would not rise at Night for fear of breaking his Repose, tho the House was on fire; no, he would be taken for a Fool or a Madman.

We see by these Examples very clearly, how unreasonable that spiritual Laziness is, which keeps Men from examining Religion. We perceive the dangerous Consequences of it, or at least the Miseries that may proceed from it. Nevertheless there have been formerly Men of this Character, and there are now even among Christians.

Acts 17.4. Such were those Jews of *Thessalonica*, whereof very few were the better for S. *Paul*'s Preaching, because they would not examine what he said; and whereof the most part, very zealous in all other things, rais'd a Commotion in the Town against the Professors of Christianity, as we are told by S. *Luke*. This appears by the Opposition which we find in the same History, of the Jews of *Berea*, another City of *Macedonia*, to those of *Thessalonica*. *These*, says the Historian, *were more noble than those of* Thessalonica, *in that they receiv'd the Word with all readiness of mind, and search'd the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so; therefore many of them believed.* If those of *Thessalonica* had Love enough for the Truth to do as much, they would not have been less ready to receive their Reasons who preach'd the Gospel to 'em. But the Laziness that detain'd them in Judaism, join'd to their other Passions, kept them from examining the Doctrine of S. *Paul*, and consequently they acknowledg'd not the Truth of it.

The present Jews who live among the Christians, and perhaps a part of the Mahometans, may neglect the Examen of Christianity out of divers Principles, such as those we have describ'd in the preceding Chapters; but I'm very apt to believe that they mix with them a great deal of that Laziness we are treating of in this Chapter.

Chapter. They are out of Love with all Meditation and Diſcuſſion; nor can there be a better Proof of it, than that they vouchſafe not even to examine why they give Credit to Judaiſm or Mahometaniſm. Being altogether buſy about ſenſible Objects and the Cares of Life, they cannot without Reluctancy think ſeriouſly and attentively of any other Subject. They may be compar'd to People extremely weary after walking a great way on foot, but deſir'd to take a longer Walk to refreſh and divert themſelves. They would not hearken, be ſure, to ſuch a Propoſition, but indulging themſelves in the Pleaſure of Repoſe, they would think of no other thing except quietly enjoying their Reſt. Thus, ſuch as are buſy about the Affairs of Life, and fatigu'd with the perpetual Cares they occaſion, are lazy as to all other things.

Chriſtianity being at this time divided into ſeveral Sects, whereof ſome muſt neceſſarily be in an Error, may we not therefore place in the Number of the Lazy thoſe Perſons, who, full of all other Things but the Love of the Truth, have never carefully examin'd which of theſe Sects is moſt conformable to the Sentiments of the Apoſtles? I own that divers other Motives might lead them to remain, without knowing why themſelves, in that Party wherein they happen'd to be born,

and to condemn all others without vouchſafing to examine their Tenets; but if you remark it well, it will appear that one of the Principles which occaſion this Conduct is a certain lazy Averſion to the Trouble of ſearching after the Truth in Matters of this kind.

We may proceed yet further, ſeeing there are People who condemn not only their native Religion without having ever ſufficiently ſtudied it, but likewiſe all other Religions, tho ſtill leſs known to them: becauſe firſt perſwading themſelves that they have diſcover'd ſome Falſity therein, they conclude next that all the reſt is of the ſame Nature; and ſo can never reſolve upon ſeriouſly or throughly examining the Truth. After having found out, as they think, that the ableſt Men they know teach a falſe Doctrine for a Goſpel-Truth, they judg by this Sample of the Religion of their own Country as well as of all others: and that Lazineſs which keeps 'em as it were enchanted, makes 'em think it more convenient to condemn all without any more ado, than to ingage in a ſolicitous enquiry after the true Principles of Chriſtianity.

I have already ſhewn the Danger and Unreaſonableneſs of this Lazineſs; nor are there any Perſons who diſagree to it: but when they would actually get quit of this Paſſion, they find themſelves ſo much pre-

prejudic'd in favour of it, that they have need of their utmoſt Endeavours to be cur'd, or to form an oppoſite Habit. Beſides all I have hitherto ſaid, we ought to reflect upon the Pleaſure of being in a contrary Diſpoſition to this idle Temper, which is not only infinitely more ſatisfactory, but likewiſe much more reaſonable; and it may happen that the Love of Truth would be preferr'd to a ſhameful Quiet, worthier of Beaſts than Men.

Let us imagine now ſuch a lazy Perſon as we have been ſpeaking of, and let us compare his Condition to that of a Man whoſe Mind being accuſtom'd to Enquiry, finds no Repoſe except in the certain Knowledg of the Truth. The firſt having perceiv'd ſome falſe Doctrine which was taught him as a true one (for we may grant this to ſeveral of the lazy Unbelievers) he rejects this Doctrine, and whatever elſe is affirm'd to be true concerning Religion, without conſidering that important Truths might be mix'd with Falſehoods in the Theology of his Country; or that there may be People perhaps elſewhere exempted from thoſe Errors that were taught him; or finally, that the Doctrine of the firſt Founders of Chriſtianity might have been miſunderſtood. Common Senſe would teach a Man to ſuſpend his Judgment at leaſt, till he had examin'd theſe three Heads. But for this

there is more Caution and Moderation requiſite than Unbelievers commonly have, who, looking upon ſuch an Examen to be impoſſible, chuſe rather to deny all at once. This is juſt as if any Reader, becauſe he had diſcover'd by chance an Error in ſome Hiſtorian, would immediately conclude, without reading any further, that the whole was pure Romance, and that there was no ſuch thing in the World as a true Hiſtory.

Notwithſtanding ſuch a ridiculous and haſty Jugdment, Unbelievers ſeem to live in as profound a Tranquillity, as a Man could do who knew by Mathematical Demonſtrations that all Religions were falſe. They appear to have ſo great an Indifference for Truth in this reſpect, as if it did not concern them to know it. They are ready, while in this Diſpoſition, to do whatever may render the Enjoyments of Life more pleaſing, nor will they hear a word of examining; and they indulge themſelves in thoſe Pleaſures as far as they judg it poſſible without doing 'em any harm. It is plain then that this Opinion opens a Door to numberleſs ſecret Crimes, and gives Encouragement in publick to all that can be practis'd with Safety. I will not inſiſt upon it, that ſuch People are bad Friends, bad Subjects, or bad Citizens, becauſe they ſacrifice every thing to their Pleaſures; I ſhall only remark,

mark, that being no way certain of the Truth of Religion, or that God would have 'em to be of any Religion, they can enjoy no other Quiet but what must be an Effect of the most notorious Folly imaginable. They are, according to their own Judgment, every Moment in a Condition of parting for ever with what they love, and which to acquire or preserve has frequently occasion'd 'em infinite Trouble. This Loss may happen by a thousand unforeseen Accidents, and at last it is sure to come unavoidably by Death, beyond which they expect nothing. Nevertheless they live securely. They behave themselves much worse than a Man would do, who being seriously told that he is condemn'd to Death, but that there were Means of escaping it if he would be at the Pains to know them; and yet would think of nothing but diverting himself, without vouchsafing to give Attention to what was said to him, tho with the Hazard of losing his Life, in case those Advisers whom he would not believe spoke Truth. If what Christianity tells us be indeed true, there are Pains infinitely surpassing Death to be fear'd by such as reject it; and yet Unbelievers who have no Certainty that these things are not true, rest securely in their Infidelity and Laziness, without informing themselves any further. In good Truth such as live in this

Dis-

Diſpoſition, and who imagine themſelves exalted above the Vulgar, are not in this reſpect much elevated above the Brutes, which are only concern'd about the preſent.

Now, on the contrary, let us ſuppoſe a Man who has well ſtudy'd the Principles of true Chriſtianity, ſatisfy'd in himſelf with the Truths he has diſcover'd, he obſerves the Precepts they enjoin him with all Tranquillity in this Life, and after Death he expects the Reward of his Faith, with a Contentment of Mind that cannot be equall'd. The moſt refin'd Reaſon, and the Laws of the Society wherein Men muſt neceſſarily live with one another, requires nothing of him, but he obeys it without heſitating; and whatever befals him, he looks upon Death only as a Paſſage to a much better Life than this. I dare affirm ſomething beyond all this; and it is, that ſuppoſing this Man deceiv'd, yet his Condition would be infinitely more deſirable than that of ſuch, as refuſing to examine Religion, reject it nevertheleſs with the Hazard of loſing themſelves for ever, and are withal in a perpetual Fear (if not quite bewitched with their Incredulity and Lazineſs) of loſing for ever all that is dear to them.

It is therefore infinitely more reaſonable and more ſure both for this and the other Life, if there be one, to ſearch after

ter Truth, and to examine the Proofs of Religion, than to live and die in the moſt extravagant Careleſneſs imaginable. This is all that I deſire ſhould be granted me here, and that cannot be deny'd me by any, without acting againſt the cleareſt Evidence of common Senſe. Thoſe who refuſe to believe the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion, ought carefully to examine themſelves, and ſee whether this Lazineſs I have deſcrib'd be not at leaſt in ſome part the Cauſe of their Incredulity. This Examination is of the utmoſt Importance, there is nothing to be loſt by making of it, and you risk all by neglecting it.

The CONCLUSION of the firſt Part.

I Have deſcrib'd in the preceding Chapters thoſe Diſpoſitions and Motives contrary to Reaſon, which might bring Unbelievers to reject the Chriſtian Religion. Altho I have conſider'd theſe different Diſpoſitions one after another, and have diſtinguiſh'd them by particular Characters, I am not of opinion however that they act ſeparately upon any, or that there are Unbelievers who may be reproach'd only with one of theſe Faults. There is not any queſtionleſs that is not at the ſame time guilty of ſeveral of them; but

but there are ſuch as may be more culpable in one than in another. Immorality makes one an Infidel; in another 'tis Pride that chiefly oppoſes it ſelf to the Light of Truth: You ſee ſome blinded by their Prejudices which they take for undoubted Maxims; there are others who do not reaſon well, or neglect informing themſelves of what they ſhould learn, or whom Lazineſs keeps from entring upon a Diſcuſſion, which to them appears too tedious and painful. And perhaps there be thoſe in whom all theſe Faults may meet in ſome degree, tho but one of them may be their predominant Paſſion. There is likewiſe infinite Variety in Mens Genius and Underſtandings with reſpect to their good or bad Qualities, and their different Conjunctions.

Did we meet with Unbelievers who could ſay, that they renounc'd the Truths of the Goſpel for no other end, but to follow the moſt conformable Principles to ſound Reaſon, and to live in a more regular manner, or more uſeful to Society; and could we meet with any of them exempted from the Faults I have deſcrib'd, it might then be juſtly ſaid, that my Enumeration of the internal Motives of Incredulity was not ſufficient, but I take it for granted that there is not one Unbeliever, in whom ſeveral of theſe Defects are not remarkable, and I take their own

Con-

Conſciences to witneſs. They are herein to do Juſtice to themſelves: for ſuch as exhort them, as I do, get nothing by it, but only the Satisfaction of performing their Duty; nor can the Unbelievers loſe any thing by examining, if they are not in ſome of thoſe Conditions by me deſcrib'd. If they are oblig'd to own themſelves in the wrong, what risk can they run by reforming? and if after a ſerious Diſcuſſion they find me deceiv'd, they'l have Reaſon to be more ſatisfy'd with their own Conduct. The Time they ſhall lay out upon this Diſquiſition cannot be counted loſt or vainly ſpent, ſeeing the Matter in Debate is the moſt important thing in the World, and that the Diſcovery of Truth muſt at all times neceſſarily produce Joy, Satisfaction and Tranquillity; or augment them, if enjoy'd already.

The

The Second Part.

Of the Motives of Incredulity which proceed from the Occasions given Unbelievers to doubt of the Christian Religion, or entirely to reject it.

CHAP. I.

That the Truth of the Christian Religion ought not to be call'd in question, because some embrace it more from Credulity than Reason.

ALtho, as I have already said, there is no Unbeliever but is in some blameable Disposition which inclines him to reject the Christian Religion, it must be confess'd however that there are many other things whereof they cannot be accus'd, but which nevertheless confirm them in these Dispositions. 'Tis true that it is ill done of them

them to forſake the Truth upon any Account whatſoever, but they are not much leſs to be blam'd who furniſh 'em with the Occaſions of doing ſo. I have undertaken to ſhew the one and the other in this Second Part, where, granting to Unbelievers that many of them who profeſs Chriſtianity are in the wrong in ſeveral things, I ſhall demonſtrate that it no way follows from thence that the Chriſtian Religion is not true, and that we ought not to attribute to the firſt Teachers of it, thoſe Faults which we remark at this Day in ſome of thoſe who call themſelves their Diſciples. The Occaſions which the latter give Unbelievers to conceive an ill Opinion of Religion, proceed either from the Perſons or from the things themſelves. I ſhall forthwith examine thoſe which the Perſons give, and afterwards ſuch as proceed from Things.

One of the moſt general and common Scandals which occaſions the Obſtinacy of Unbelievers is, that they ſee a world of People who are Chriſtians not from Reaſon and Underſtanding, but from their Education, and out of mere Credulity. If theſe had been born in *Aſia*, they would, without changing their Diſpoſition, be Idolaters or Mahometans; and as zealouſly embrace the idle Dreams of the Bramins, or the Errors of *Mahomet*, as they believe in *Europe* that the Chriſtian Reli-

Religion is true. They receive Fables that are manifeſtly ridiculous with no leſs Reſpect than the moſt certain Hiſtories; and they believe not leſs the moſt pernicious Doctrines and the moſt contrary to the Good of Mankind, than the holieſt and moſt uſeful Precepts of the Goſpel. It is not the Nature of the Objects laid open by the Teachers of Religion to their Underſtanding, which determines theſe to believe 'em true, or to look upon them with Reſpect; but it is the Authority of thoſe who ſpeak to them well or ill-grounded, and a certain Credulity carefully cheriſh'd in their Minds, becauſe of the Advantages drawn by ſome from it, as we ſhall ſhew in the Sequel.

Deceiv'd by a faint Reſemblance, they call their *Credulity* by the Name of *Faith*, and maintain that thoſe want it who believe not as they do all that is told 'em by their Preachers, and conſequently that they have not ſuch a Diſpoſition as the Goſpel requires of Men, ſeeing it promiſes Salvation only to thoſe who have *Faith*. If any Perſon reaſons about Religion, and ſays that it can neither be known nor prov'd without Reaſoning, preſently theſe People, who neither know the Proofs nor the Doctrines of it but very confuſedly, are ſure to ſuſpect him of Irreligion, eſpecially if he forſakes any of the common Sentiments, the Falſity whereof he may have

have discover'd by his Application and study. These People so much perswaded, if you believe them, of the Truth of Christianity, cannot believe many times that a Man who knows how to reason well should embrace it in good earnest, and they are alarm'd at the least Examination of it.

In the mean time, the Unbelievers who hear these Discourses, and behold this Conduct so visibly repugnant to common Sense, laugh at this pretended Faith, and draw from it this unhappy Consequence, that the Doctrine to be receiv'd so credulously is either false, or at least to be extremely suspected.

Thus the Heathens formerly hearing the Christians say, *that they needed only to believe in order to be sav'd*; and not understanding what this meant, * laugh'd in like manner at the Christian Religion, as if none could receive it but credulous Persons, and such as were not capable of reasoning. And indeed if it had for a main Principle this Doctrine, *That People must embrace it without knowing why, and that such as should thus believe it should be sav'd:* If they had maintain'd this, I say, the Preachers of this Religion might be justly suspected of Imposture, and those who receiv'd it, without being able to render any Reason, be condemn'd as too credulous. To speak in such Terms would con-

* Origen. cont. Cels. l. 1, & 6.

found Religion with all ſorts of Impoſtures, which are only eſtabliſh'd upon the Credulity of the People: It would likewiſe open a Door to all the Falſhoods that could be told, if Belief were all that was requiſite; for there could be no Reaſon to receive one thing without Examen no more than another. Were this ſo, how could the Chriſtians boaſt of being certain of the Truth of their Religion, and the Falſity of others; ſince the Belief of all Religions would be built upon the ſame Credulity?

But 'tis falſe that the Chriſtian Religion requires Aſſent without Examination, or that it is grounded upon a blind Faith. It is alſo falſe, that ſuch as receive it upon thoſe ſcores can paſs for Chriſtians whoſe Faith is praiſe-worthy.

To be certain of the firſt of theſe two things we need but conſider the Conduct and Diſcourſes of Jeſus Chriſt. Had he come into the World without any Character to diſtinguiſh him from Impoſtors who have frequently impos'd upon the Credulous; was he to be believ'd merely upon his own Word, or had he requir'd any ſuch thing, the Jews would have done well to reject him. Nay, and had he in very deed been ſent of God, if he did not offer cogent Proofs of it, no body could be blam'd for not believing on him: for then ſuch as were the moſt perſwaded of

the

the Truth of the Jewish Religion, and therefore the best dispos'd to embrace the Doctrine of those Prophets God would be pleas'd to send to them, could not, without hazard of deceiving themselves, acknowledg any Man to be effectually a Prophet, who could give them no evident Marks of his Mission.

Therefore Jesus Christ came arm'd with the Power of working Miracles, and he wrought so great a Number, if you credit the Evangelists, that he infinitely surpass'd all the Prophets who were before him. Now this is the Mark which *Moses* taught the Israelites should discover the true Prophets, and Jesus Christ grounded himself upon it when he requir'd Assent to his Doctrine. He never desir'd any to believe in him purely upon his Word, as it may be seen by divers Passages in the Gospels.

If I bear Witness of my self, says he, *my Witness is not true*, that is, it cannot be look'd upon as true, unless there be some other Proofs of it besides my saying so. Then, after telling that *John Baptist* had bore him witness, he adds, *I have a greater Witness than that of* John; *for the Works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same Works that I do bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.* He further says to those that desir'd him to declare if he were the Christ, *The Works that I do in my* Fa-

Joh. 5. 31.

Ver. 36.

Ch. 10. 25. *Father's Name bear Witneſs of me:* and a little lower, *If I do not the Works of my Fa-*
Ver. 37. *ther, believe me not; but if I do, tho you believe not me, believe the Works.* What can be ſaid more to the purpoſe than what you meet with in the ſame Goſpel, *viz. If*
Ch. 15. 24. *I had not done amongſt 'em the Works which none other Man did, they had not had Sin?* By this it appears clearly that the Author of the Chriſtian Religion did not require Aſſent to his bare Word.

His Apoſtles have acted juſt after the ſame manner; for they did not only affirm that they had ſeen the Miracles of their Maſter, or that he had ſpoken to them from Heaven after his Aſcenſion; but they have alſo join'd to their Teſtimony all the Marks of Truth that could be poſſibly deſir'd. Their Doctrine conſider'd in it ſelf did not afford the leaſt Occaſion to ſuſpect Impoſture; they could not expect any temporal Advantage by publiſhing it; on the contrary they met every where with an obſtinate Reſiſtance from the Jews and Heathens; they were ill us'd every Moment, and walk'd in perpetual Dangers: In a word, many of 'em ſuffer'd Death for conſtantly perſevering in the Profeſſion of the Truth. And to accumulate Proofs, they wrought Miracles like to thoſe of Jeſus Chriſt, as he promis'd them they ſhould before he left them. The Incredulous will object perhaps

haps that I beg the Queſtion by ſuppoſing the Truth of what is doubted of; but my Deſign is not now to infer any Conſequences from theſe Facts in favour of the Chriſtian Religion: I only conclude from hence that the Apoſtles did not preach a blind Faith or Obedience, as ſome Chriſtians do at this time: One of them exhorts thoſe to whom he writes, *not to believe every Spirit, but to try the Spirits whether they be of God, becauſe many falſe Prophets were gone out into the World.* Another adviſes them, *to try all things, and to hold faſt that which is beſt.* 1 John 4. 1. 1 Theſſ. 5. 21.

It cannot be ſaid therefore that ſuch as cry up implicite Faith do act according to the Genius of Chriſtianity; nor can the ridiculous Pretences of thoſe who require Aſſent to their ſay-ſo, be juſtly attributed to Jeſus Chriſt or his Apoſtles. It may be demanded of me here perhaps, what that *Faith* is which is ſo much commended in the Writings of Chriſt's Diſciples. This is not the proper Place of diſcuſſing this Subject throughly, nor will I meddle with any more of it than is abſolutely neceſſary to ſolve this Difficulty. *Faith*, as we have ſaid before, being not an implicite Belief, conſiſts firſt in aſſenting to good Proofs, that is, as ſtrong Proofs as the Nature of the thing will bear. For inſtance, A Man affirms himſelf to be ſent of God, he preaches a certain Doctrine

to me, which he confirms by Miracles. Immediately I examine this Doctrine in it self, without regard to any Prejudices, and without considering whether it be conformable to my present Disposition or not; and if I find that it contains nothing false, I conclude it may possibly come from God. Then I proceed to the Miracles, and if I see 'em wrought, or if I find the Truth of them attested by Persons worthy of Credit, I cannot doubt but God has actually sent this Man.

Those who are capable of making this Examen as they ought, are worthy of great Praise; for in the first place they must quit all their Prejudices, and consider what is propos'd to them, not as it relates to themselves, but with respect to the eternal Laws of Truth and Falshood. Secondly, they must have a great Love for the Truth to go through with an Examination, whose Consequences may prove very opposite to their temporal Interests, as I have shewn in the first Part of this Work. There are Times and Places when a Man cannot declare himself perswaded of the Truth of the Gospel, without exposing himself to most cruel Persecutions; and it may be said, that the Commands of Christ cannot be exactly observed by us any where almost, without drawing upon our selves the Hatred and Contempt of such as disobey them, that is,

is, of the greateſt Part of Men. So that to be a good Chriſtian, there is more Courage and Reſolution neceſſary than is commonly imagin'd; nor can it therefore be doubted, but that Faith, ſuch as the Goſpel requires of us, is a very great Vertue.

It is alſo deſerving of much Commendation, if we conſider that it is never found but in Minds well-diſpos'd. It engages us not only to believe that he who ſpeaks to us in the Name of God, and adds ſufficient Proofs of it, has been really ſo ſent, but alſo to expect great things of God for the future, grounding our ſelves upon the Proofs he exhibits of his Power. Thoſe who ſaw the Perſons brought to Life again by Jeſus Chriſt, who ſaw himſelf after his Reſurrection, and who could not doubt of the Truth of theſe Miracles, were oblig'd from hence to a firm Perſwaſion of what he taught them concerning the general Reſurrection of all Men. I'm of opinion that no reaſonable Man will look upon the laſt as impoſſible, if he holds the firſt to be true; for there is no greater Difficulty in raiſing an hundred than one again: and it could not, without Folly, be ſaid by any, that God's Power was all ſpent upon thoſe firſt Effects of it they had ſeen. Nevertheleſs, Men being accuſtom'd to believe nothing but what they learn from their own Experience, can

ſcarcely be perſwaded of any thing without ſeeing ſome Examples of it. He muſt be a Perſon of Diſcernment and good Senſe who draws ſuch a Conſequence as I have mention'd; and he muſt alſo have ſome Equity, to expect for the future ſuch great things from the Marks that God has given of his Power. An unjuſt and obſtinate Man will believe nothing except what he ſees, and has no regard to any thing but the preſent.

It cannot be deny'd therefore, but that ſuch an enlightn'd and underſtanding Faith as we have deſcrib'd, is a moſt commendable Diſpoſition of Mind, and moſt agreeable to the pureſt Light of Reaſon. But here I foreſee an Objection, *viz.* I ſhall be told that I have deſcrib'd the Faith of ſuch as had ſeen the Miracles of Jeſus Chriſt and his Apoſtles, and not their Faith who live at this time. To this I anſwer, that what I have ſaid of the Perſwaſion of ſuch as have ſeen thoſe Miracles, may be eaſily apply'd to them that now will examine the Proofs we have that ſuch Miracles were really perform'd. To aſſent to theſe Proofs one muſt be in a Diſpoſition like to theirs who firſt embrac'd Chriſtianity, by ſeeing the Miracles of its Founders. Nay, in ſome ſenſe it may be ſaid, that ſuch as reliſh thoſe Proofs, and draw from them their natural Conſequences, ought to be better diſpos'd than thoſe who were

were the Eye-witneſſes of the Actions of Chriſt and his Apoſtles; becauſe what is ſeen makes an Impreſſion upon the moſt ignorant Perſons; whereas abſtracted Proofs require more Penetration and Love of Truth than moſt Men have. This is the Reaſon that Jeſus Chriſt ſpeaking to St. *Thomas*, who without he ſaw him would not believe his Reſurrection, ſays to him, *Thomas, becauſe thou haſt ſeen me thou believeſt; Bleſſed are they that have not ſeen, and yet have believed.* He accus'd him of Obſtinacy, becauſe having no juſt Occaſion of ſuſpecting any Fraud in the other Apoſtles who affirm'd they had ſeen their Maſter, yet he would not believe them. If this Diſpoſition be blameable, as indeed it is, we muſt on the other hand commend their Diſpoſition, who, without ſeeing, aſſent to ſufficient Reaſons. St. *Peter* therefore praiſes thoſe Chriſtians to whom he wrote, becauſe *they loved Jeſus Chriſt whom they had not ſeen, and becauſe they believed in him, tho then they ſaw him not.*

Joh. 20. 29

1 Pet. 1. 8.

It will be eaſily granted perhaps that Docility, the contrary Diſpoſition to Obſtinacy, is very praiſe-worthy; but it may be ſaid to me, that the knowing Faith which proceeds from it, muſt be a very rare thing, compar'd to the blind Faith I condemn. It is well known that there are few Men of all Qualities and Conditi-

ons

ons fit to examine throughly ſuch Proofs as our Belief is built upon, and that do not judg of the Cauſe before underſtanding it. From thence it muſt follow, ſome will ſay, that you deny to a great many thoſe Commendations which you beſtow upon diſcerning Faith. The moſt ſimple, and theſe are ſuch as were thought fitteſt to receive the Goſpel, are not capable to examine their Proofs, and ſo excluded, according to you, from the Kingdom of Heaven.

Theſe Difficulties, I confeſs, appear ſpecious at firſt ſight, but at bottom have no Solidity. *Firſt*; I agree that true Faith is a thing infinitely more rare than Credulity or Infidelity, and herein I do but follow the Doctrine of the Goſpel, which
Mat. 20. 16 & 17. 14. ſays, *that many are called but few choſen.* That Vertue which the Goſpel requires of Men is not a thing commonly met with, no more than extraordinary Knowledg. Nor ought the Incredulous to wonder that the Deſcription I have made of the true Faith agrees but to very few People. On the contrary, we might ſuſpect the Sincerity of the firſt Teachers of Chriſtianity, had they taught a Doctrine fit to draw in a great Multitude without Knowledg or Vertue, promiſing them Salvation notwithſtanding their Ignorance and Vices. It would have been ſaid not without Reaſon, that they only deſign'd to gain

gain the Multitude, and to augment the Number of their Followers. But the Author of the Christian Religion has said, *that strait is the Gate* of Salvation, *and* Mat. 7. 14. *that they are few who enter it.*

Secondly; The Simple, or the Babes whom the Gospel commends, are not ignorant or stupid Men, who have no Relish of Truth. They are not self-conceited Persons, they are troubl'd with few Prejudices, and are ready to embrace Truth and Vertue when offer'd or taught them. On the contrary, the wise and prudent, who are not fit to receive the Gospel, are Men puft up with pretended Knowledg, full of Prejudices, and so dispos'd as to reject whatever is not conformable to their Ideas, and their present Condition. Such were the Priests and Scribes of the Jews, and most of the best Quality of that Nation. They were so strongly perswaded that there could not be imagin'd a better way of serving God than that which they learnt from *Moses*, and that there was no Theology more excellent than their own; that to offer at undeceiving them was enough to procure their Hatred and Indignation. Moreover, they were not Persons who knew how to reason strictly, or that had exact Ideas of Theology and Morals. The Law of *Moses* explain'd by their Teachers, and their Traditions good or bad, made up all their Knowledg.

Jesus

Jesus Christ calls 'em Wise and Prudent, only because they were commonly thought so. On the other hand, such as he calls Babes, were People look'd upon by the Doctors of the Law as Children in comparison of the Learned; but that indeed were much more capable of relishing Truth than they, because they were neither blinded with Prejudices, nor fill'd with a high Conceit of themselves. They were also Men of good Sense, very competent Judges of the Truth of Christ's Miracles, and the Sanctity of his Doctrine.

Something of this nature may be met with every Day in those Places where Theology is corrupted by the Errors that are mix'd with it. Let any address himself to an unlearned Person, but of good Sense and Morals, he can be easily perswaded that the Divinity of his Country is erroneous: He shall very well perceive the Force of a good Argument, and yields Assent to Truth as soon as he knows it. Go on the contrary, and propose the same thing to a Divine, there is no wrangling Shifts nor Chichaneries that he has not recourse to, rather than acknowledg the Truth; and his pretended Learning contributes often to render the clearest Truths obscure to him. In the mean time, if you would represent to him the Example of one amongst the Vulgar, who had

had been convinc'd by your Reaſons, he would treat him immediately as an ignorant or fickle Fellow, altho he had much more Senſe and Integrity than himſelf. This is what Jeſus Chriſt remark'd when he ſaid, *I thank thee, O Father, becauſe thou haſt hidden theſe things from the Wiſe and Prudent, and haſt reveal'd them unto Babes.* Mat. 11. 25.

But ſome will preſs upon me harder, it may be, and ask what I think of that great Number of People, who not only have no ſort of Learning, but that cannot conceive an Argument of two Lines, that underſtand not the Proofs of Chriſtianity, that conſequently are not capable of examining them, and that nevertheleſs profeſs to believe in Jeſus Chriſt.

Altho an infinite Number of People be comprehended under the Name of rude and ignorant Perſons, we muſt however acknowledg that there are ſeveral Degrees and Sorts of Ignorance. They cannot be all exactly diſtinguiſh'd, but this is not neceſſary to anſwer the Queſtion propos'd. I ſhall remark in the firſt place, that thoſe rude and ignorant Perſons who are Men of ill Morals, and continue ſuch, are not of their Number whoſe Faith is acceptable to God, tho they make Profeſſion of believing in Jeſus Chriſt. He will make no more account of 'em for this, than if they had been in a quite oppoſite Perſwaſion; and 'tis certain that no Ignorance can excuſe

cuſe them, as we could eaſily ſhew. Secondly, if Men not of ſuch ill Morals, at leaſt not in ſo ſcandalous a manner, ſhould embrace the Goſpel out of pure Credulity, as they would receive the contrary were they taught it, 'tis evident this is not the Faith ſo much extoll'd by the Goſpel. A Proof whereof is, that thoſe People ordinarily change from black to white, according as they alter their Minds who have the Conduct of their Conſciences. Nor do I well know whether ſuch Men can be properly ſaid to be of any Opinion: for they have no Conception of what is never ſo little abſtracted, and only conform themſelves externally to thoſe for whom they have a Reſpect.

But among thoſe that may be term'd groſs and ignorant Perſons, there are ſome who, without any Learning, have much Uprightneſs and Integrity of Mind, which makes them admire and receive the Truths of the Goſpel as ſoon as propos'd to them, tho they are not always capable to expreſs clearly all that they think. The Beauty of the Evangelick Morals makes a great Impreſſion upon ſuch Men, and eaſily gains their Souls; and as they diſcover nothing in the other Doctrines of Chriſtianity that ſhocks their Notions or Deſires, they cordially embrace them, and conſtantly perſevere to believe them. This Diſpoſition and Carriage is certainly very

very commendable, and conformable to the Doctrine of Jeſus Chriſt. Such were, for example, the Apoſtles, before they were extraordinarily illuminated. The Miracles and Diſcourſes of Jeſus Chriſt gain'd them in a ſmall time; and the more they continu'd with him, the more they admir'd him, altho they were ſtill prepoſſeſs'd with ſome Jewiſh Errors.

We may place alſo in this Rank the Publicans and Women of ill Lives, who were converted by ſeeing the Miracles and hearing the Doctrine of Chriſt. There are a world of People of this ſort, who are for a time drawn into an evil and ſhameful manner of Life by ſeducing Temptations, and the Force of certain Conjunctures; but all the while the Love of Truth and Vertue is not quite extinguiſh'd in them. And this is the Reaſon that when Providence lays the one or the other before them in a ſenſible and touching way, as in the time of Jeſus Chriſt, and upon a thouſand other Occaſions, they forthwith renounce their Immoralities, and zealouſly take up the oppoſite Method of Living.

At this Day ſuch as truly believe in Chriſt, and that are not capable of making long Deductions, have not indeed the ſame Advantages as the Apoſtles had, and the other Diſciples, who ſaw thoſe Miracles wrought which convinc'd them, without

out much reasoning, of the Truth of his Mission, and the Divinity of his Doctrine. But the Doctrine of Jesus Christ being always the same, the Holiness of its Precepts recommends them as much as ever to the understanding of such as are not quite corrupted with the bad Customs of the Age. We see every day the Excellency and Usefulness of them, whether we consider them as practis'd by others, or remark the Disorders which accompany all ways of living opposite to them. To perceive this, there is need only of a little Vertue and good Sense. On the other hand, if we cast our Eye upon the Doctrines contain'd in the Gospel, and which solely tend to lead us to the Observation of its Precepts, to procure us eternal Happiness, there is nothing herein but what is worthy of God, especially if they be drawn out of those Fountains which the Subtlety of Modern Divines has not corrupted. Nor does the History of the first Establishment of the Gospel contain any thing but what is conformable to the Doctrine of it, and proper to perswade us of its Truth. This History written in so plain and natural a Method, carries in it self all the Characters of Sincerity; insomuch that in reading of it, one has not the least Suspicion to make him doubt, whether the Writers of it believ'd it or not. The most part of the Matters of

Fact

Fact mention'd in it are of such a Nature that few could be deceiv'd about them. All this join'd together is more than sufficient to perswade a Man whom Vice, or I know not what Science falsly so call'd, hath not blinded: and the Difficulties which the Incredulous find in them proceed rather from their Disposition of Mind than from the things themselves.

It is indeed true that the Persons we speak of are not capable to judg of those subtle and perplex'd Questions which divide the Divines. But it cannot be said neither, that the distinct Belief of Doctrines above the reach of a discreet and sincere Man that loves Vertue, tho he has no Learning; it cannot be affirm'd, I say, that such a distinct Belief is necessary to his Salvation. Every Man that loves the Truth, that according to his best Understanding embraces all that he conceives in the Gospel, that orders his Life by what he believes, and that endeavours as much as possible he can to encrease his Knowledg, does all that is requisite to obtain Salvation from the Mercy of God, according to the Ideas we have of it from the Gospel. For it may be said, that this Man improves the Talents he receiv'd as much as God indispensibly requires it of him; and nothing hinders, but we may apply to him what Jesus Christ said in the Parable; *Good and faithful Servant, thou hast* Mat. 25. 23

been faithful over a few things, I will make thee Ruler over many things: enter thou into the Joy of thy Lord.

If it be objected to me further, that there are ſome who are not by any means capable to ſee in the Morals of the Goſpel, in its other Doctrines, and in the Hiſtory of it, that Uſefulneſs, Excellence and Sincerity which I ſaid might be remark'd therein, and nevertheleſs believe it to be true; I have nothing to reply to this but what I have ſaid already. Theſe People imitate others, but they have not that Faith which the Goſpel demands. It is not calculated indeed for the Learned alone, but no more is it for Brutes. Such as underſtand not, or are ſuppos'd not capable to underſtand any thing of it, ſhould become Men before they think of being Chriſtians; for there is no great Difference between them and the Savages of *Africa* or *America*.

So I may conclude that the Incredulous do calumniate the Chriſtian Religion when they accuſe it of requiring from Men a blind Credulity, and to condemn Examination. It has been ſhewn that there is nothing more falſe, by Reaſons, if I'm not miſtaken, that can never be anſwer'd.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

That the Immorality or Ignorance of those who sometimes shew the greatest Zeal for Religion, ought not to render it suspected to the Incredulous.

THE Christian Religion demanded not only that it should be thought true, but also that this Belief be externally profess'd, and that a Man let no Opportunity slip of shewing others by his Life and Discourse that he's firmly perswaded of it. 'Tis by no means a speculative Science to continue lock'd up in the Memory, without bearing any Fruit out of it, and without appearing in their manner of Living who are convinc'd of its Truth. It fills them with a certain Ardour for the Observation of what it commands, that the true Christians are easily perceiv'd to be in earnest. 'Tis this Disposition that is call'd *Zeal* from a Greek Word which signifies *Jealousy*, to shew that we ought not to have less Ardour for the Honour of Christianity than a Bridegroom should be concern'd to preserve that of his Bride.

This Zeal extends generally to all the Doctrines, and to all the Precepts of the

Goſpel, and not to ſome of them only. We ought zealouſly to defend the Truths we learn from it, otherwiſe it were to betray and equal it to Falſhood; nor ought we to manifeſt leſs Ardour in obſerving its Injunctions, ſeeing this is not leſs eſſential than the Belief of its Doctrines. The one and the other muſt be joined; for Chriſtianity is entirely ruin'd, if thoſe things be ſeparated which the Author of it has united. The Reaſon of this is, that the Doctrines lead us to the Obſervation of the Precepts, being reveal'd to us for this end; and the Obſervation of the Precepts does indiſpenſibly ſuppoſe a ſtrong Perſwaſion of the Doctrines.

All Chriſtians are agreed about this Principle, and Jeſus Chriſt and his Apoſtles are very expreſs about it, ſo that there is no neceſſity to prove it. Nevertheleſs, it is evident that ſuch as ſhew the greateſt Zeal for the Chriſtian Doctrines, and for the way of explaining them in their Country, are frequently ſeen to violate the cleareſt Precepts of it after a moſt ſcandalous manner, as if this Ardour they ſhew for the Defence of the Doctrines were all that the Goſpel requires of Men.

There are ſome People, for inſtance, whoſe Diſcourſes breathe nothing elſe, one would think, but the Love of the Truth, and the Deſire of preſerving the Knowledg

ledg of it, and of propagating it amongſt Men. They write in favour of it, they defend it with much heat againſt oppoſite Errors, and they ſtick at no difficulty to make Truth triumph over Falſhood. Nay, they expoſe themſelves ſometimes to Dangers for this with a ſurprizing Courage. But theſe very ſame People who ſeem entirely devoted to the Service of God, and the Defence of Religion, are ſometimes altogether intractable, when a Man has any Dealings with them. Selfiſh, proud, deceitful, Slanderers, uncharitable, and breaking moſt of the Commandments regarding their Neighbour, they imagine themſelves the beſt Chriſtians in the World; and the ignorant or corrupt Multitude looks upon 'em as in effect good Men. Such were in Chriſt's time the Phariſees, whoſe Zeal for the Law we read of in the Goſpel, where at the ſame time they are repreſented as a very ill ſort of Men. There are too many ſuch at this time, and every Country will furniſh frequent Examples to all that have a mind to make their Obſervations. What St. *Paul* ſaid long ago to the hypocritical Jews, may be now ſaid to many People; *You that make your boaſt of the Law, by breaking the Law, diſhonour God; for the Name of God is blaſphem'd among the Gentiles through you.* Rom. 2. 23

The Unbelievers who take notice of theſe Men, draw a Conſequence very injurious

rious to the Chriſtian Religion; which is, that ſeeing thoſe who paſs for the Pillars of Religion, who have ſometimes the beſt Employments, and who are in moſt Eſteem, are ſuch ill People, the Religion it ſelf is but a mere Artifice to deceive the Simple, and to cover their Paſſions under a Pretence which gains 'em Reſpect: For in a word, all that the Zealous do, if you believe 'em, is for no other end but the Service of God. Thus Unbelievers come to imagine that the Beauty of the Chriſtian Morals, which they cannot deny, is only a fine Idea to impoſe the more eaſily upon ſuch as are not always upon their Guard. They are much talk'd of, ſay they, but the moſt Zealous obſerve no more of them than ſerves their turn. They would have others, perhaps, obey them exactly, that they might get by it, but as for themſelves they laugh at them. You'l hear thoſe, for example, preach Charity and Impartiality, who have neither the one nor the other, but are wonderfully pleas'd to find thoſe they have to do with not ſelfiſh or uncharitable, becauſe it makes for their Advantage.

This is what Unbelievers ſay, and they are never unfurniſh'd with Examples to cite about all the Chriſtian Vertues, whereof there is not one that has not been violated by ſome Zealot, and many times without doing him any Injury in the Opi-

nion

nion of the World, because this Appearance of Zeal covers all Defects.

The Fact we deny not, and we may add further, that Jesus Christ and his Apostles have foreseen it, by exalting that Charity which is principally violated by this false Zeal, above not only Orthodoxy, but even the highest Knowledg, and the Power of working Miracles it self. Not every one that cries unto me, *Lord,* Mat. 7. 21. *Lord,* says Jesus Christ, that is, who makes Profession of the Truth of my Doctrine, *shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven: but he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name? and in thy Name have cast out Devils? and in thy Name have done many wonderful Works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me you that work Iniquity.* This is a manifest Admonition which the Author of the Christian Religion gives to his Disciples, to prevent the evil Example of pretended Zealots making any Impression upon them. St. *Paul* likewise expresses himself upon this occasion in such emphatical terms, that it was not possible for him to speak more home: *Tho I speak,* says he, *with the* 1 Cor. 13. 1 *Tongues of Men and Angels, and have not Charity, I'm become as a sounding Brass, or a tinkling Cymbal. And tho I have the Gift of Prophecy, and understand all Mysteries,*

and all Knowledg: and tho I have all Faith, ſo that I could remove Mountains, and have no Charity, I am nothing. And tho I beſtow all my Goods to feed the Poor, and tho I give my Body to be burned, and have not Charity, it profiteth me nothing.

It appears plainly hereby that the Carriage of pretended Zealots is directly contrary to the Principles of the Goſpel, as I have ſhewn from the beginning of this Chapter. This may ſerve for an Anſwer to Unbelievers, who cannot, without Injuſtice, confound ſome Perſons Abuſe of Religion with Religion it ſelf. If any pretended to have very much ſtudy'd a certain Science, and that it appear'd by ſome of his Diſcourſes that he underſtood nothing of it, could it be concluded from thence that this Science was only a Chimera? No body durſt maintain it. But 'tis juſt thus with the Chriſtian Religion, and ſuch as are carry'd away with a falſe Zeal.

The Incredulous object further, that ſince thoſe who ſhew the greateſt Zeal obſerve not the moſt important Precepts of this Religion, 'tis at leaſt a ſign that they are not themſelves perſwaded of its Truth; for otherwiſe, ſay they, they would not quit the beſt part of it, ſeeing, if the ſpeculative Doctrines be true, what concerns Practice is not leſs ſo. But if the moſt zealous are not perſwaded of their

their Religion, what may be judg'd of its Proofs?

This is certainly a Prejudice that is very difficultly conquer'd in the Minds of those who have more regard to what is said than to what is done, and who look upon Mens Morals as the Character of their Belief. Every Person has not strength of Thought enough to consider the Laws of the Gospel in themselves, without any respect to the manner how they are obey'd, or to the Judgment that Christians seem to make of them by their Conduct. But at bottom this is an ill-grounded Prejudice, from which no Consequence can be inferr'd against the Truth of the Christian Religion, as it will appear by the following Remarks.

First of all, we may grant that there are some of those Zealots in shew for a part of the Christian Doctrines, who are not in effect perswaded of any of them, and who make use of the Cloak of Religion to impose upon the Multitude, the better to carry on their Affairs in the World. But does it follow from hence that the Christian Religion is not true? By no means; since it is evident that these Men may be deceiv'd as well as others. They are not always such as make the greatest Noise about an Art that best understand it. And if all the Discourses of these People were well examin'd, it might be easily

easily perceiv'd that the Christian Religion has Beauties to which they are utter Strangers. There might be also remark'd in their Dispositions some invincible Obstacles to the sincere Acknowledgment of the Truth of Christianity, which is entirely contrary to those Dispositions. The greatest part of these People believe, for example, that Force must be made use of to establish Truth, and that the Magistrates who favour them ought to use those hardly that are not of their Sentiments. Nay, they maintain, that without this Christianity is lost, and that all other Religions shall triumph over it. All had been still Pagan, according to them, if *Constantine* and the other succeeding Christian Emperors had not employ'd their Authority to destroy Heathenism. Now what other thing can such Discourses mean, but that they are Strangers to the true Proofs of Christianity, as well as to the Spirit of Charity and Moderation, which is the Life and Soul of the Gospel? Those who have well study'd these Proofs, and carefully examin'd all the Parts whereof the Christian Religion is made up, find it so well grounded, its Promises so becoming God and Men, and its Precepts so useful to humane Society, that to make it wholly triumph over Error, it is enough in their Judgment to obtain a Liberty of preaching it, and that such as profess it may

may incur no Danger for ſo doing; in a word, that it may oppoſe the contrary Opinions with equal Arms. Theſe Perſons animated with that Spirit of Moderation, whereof I ſpoke, and equally preſſing all the Parts of Chriſtianity, do not contradict by their Actions the Doctrines they profeſs with their Mouths. If Religion therefore were to be judg'd of from the Conduct and Diſcourſes of its Profeſſors, regard ought to be had rather to theſe Men than to others.

Secondly, I have ſhew'd elſewhere that ſince Men do not always act according to their Knowledg, but moſt frequently follow the Movements of their Paſſions, their Sentiments muſt not be always concluded from their Carriage. This being ſo, it may probably happen that certain Zealots might act very diſagreeably to their Profeſſion, which is an Argument that we ought not to judg of their Perſwaſion from their Manners. We muſt confeſs however, that if in thoſe Zealots there appears a continual Series of Actions contrary to the cleareſt Commands of the Goſpel, or inveterate Habits of walking contrary to what muſt be known to be an eſſential part of Chriſtianity, then we have great occaſion to ſuſpect them of Hypocriſy, and a Deſign of covering their Infidelity with a ſhew of Zeal. For it is not poſſible but that a ſtrong and ſincere

Belief

Belief ſhould at length eradicate out of the Heart all Habits which are directly contrary to it. But the moſt ingenuous Men may act ſometimes againſt their Perſwaſion by Surprize, or the ſudden Motions of a violent Paſſion.

Thirdly, As it would be Injuſtice to judg of the Goodneſs of the Laws of any Government from the way how they are obſerv'd, ſo it would be very ill reaſoning to condemn the Chriſtian Religion, becauſe ſuch as profeſs it obey it not. There may be moſt excellent Laws, and acknowledg'd too for ſuch, yet not always ſtrictly obſerv'd, by reaſon of the Intereſts and Paſſions of thoſe who break 'em, as it may be remark'd in all Kingdoms of the World. 'Tis juſt ſo with the Chriſtian Religion. What cauſes this Contradiction between the Sentiments and Carriage of Men, beſides the Reaſons already alledg'd, is perhaps becauſe they know not how to apply the general Laws to the particular Caſes which happen every day, and that they miſtake the moſt prohibited Actions for Exceptions to the Rules. A famous Philoſopher ſaid, *that moſt of Mens Errors proceeded from their not knowing how to apply general to particular Ideas.* If we conſider it nearly, we ſhall find that the ſame thing occaſions at leaſt in part the violation of many Laws, which are all the while thought juſt and well-grounded.

Arrian *upon* Epictetus, l. 3. c. 26.

Zeal

Zeal accompany'd with very great Ignorance, and the greater as the Ignorance is groſſer, furniſhes the Incredulous likewiſe with another Pretence of looking upon Religion as a blind Perſwaſion merely built upon the Credulity of the People. And indeed we ſee that in all Religions ſuch as have leaſt examin'd things, and that are the leſs diſcerning, appear frequently the hotteſt in defence of the Party with which they are engag'd. The furious Zeal of the Jews and Mahumetans, as well as that of the Pagan Populace, is ſo well known, that I need bring no Examples of it. In thoſe Sects alſo into which Chriſtianity is at preſent divided, the Heat wherewith the ignorant Multitude defend their Sentiments, and endeavour to propagate them, is but too common. This blind Zeal has ſo often broke out, and has made uſe of ſuch ill Methods to advance each Party, that there is no Sect but has ſome reaſon to be aſham'd of it.

But if this falſe Zeal may be conſider'd as a Conſequence of the Principles of the Heathens, the Mahumetans, the Jews, and ſome of the Chriſtians; it is certain that true Chriſtianity gives it no Approbation: ſo that if the Falſity of theſe Religions or Sects may be hence concluded, yet it follows not that we can reaſon againſt Chriſtianity in the ſame manner. I have already ſhewn in the precedent Chapter

that

that it requires no such thing as a blind Obedience from such as embrace it, and that it expressly condemns the furious Zeal which flows from this Spring. One of Christ's Apostles acknowledging that the Jews had *a Zeal for God*, adds, that it was without Knowledg, and blames it exceedingly. Another says to those to whom he writes; *If you have bitter Zeal and Strife in your Hearts, glory not, and lie not against the Truth: This Wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, deviliſh: for where this Zeal and Strife is, there is Confusion and every evil Work.*

Rom. 10. 2
Gal. 1. 14.
Jam. 3. 14.

This blind Zeal then is not an Effect of the Christian Religion, and cannot be reasonably attributed to it; it is a Consequence of the Temper and Education of the ignorant Populace, who instead of defending the Truth by its proper Light, and the Vertues it does produce in their Hearts who duly receive it, defend it with the same Arms they would Error, that is, with Passion and Fury. This sort of People cannot, without extreme Injustice, be look'd upon as Models whereby to judg of the Spirit and Effects of Christianity, since it clearly condemns their Conduct. We must on the contrary cast our Eye upon the understanding Persons who make use of none but good Reasons in its Defence; and that, to procure themselves Love and Respect, practise only those calm and peace-

peaceable Vertues they learn from Truth. This is the Character which the Founders of Chriſtianity beſtow upon them who ought to be conſider'd as the true Chriſtians. *The Wiſdom that is from above*, ſays the ſame Apoſtle, *is firſt pure, then peaceable, gentle, and eaſy to be entreated, full of Mercy and good Fruits, without Partiality, and without Hypocriſy.*

CHAP. III.

That Unbelievers are in the wrong for rejecting the Chriſtian Religion, becauſe Intereſt ſeems to be the Cauſe of moſt Peoples Devotion.

SInce Chriſtianity has flouriſh'd in the World, it has frequently prov'd an advantagious thing to ſhew great Zeal for the Doctrines of it. Altho this makes no Change in the thing it ſelf, (Truth not depending upon the Intereſt one has or has not to defend it) yet the Incredulous are ſure to take an occaſion from hence of doubting the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion. There are Endeavours made ſometimes to gain them over, by repreſenting to them the Conſent of the Clergy in ſo many Places and Ages: but they inſtantly reply, that 'tis no wonder

der if thoſe Men did make a Profeſſion of Chriſtianity, ſince they would be great getters by it in ſo doing, but muſt loſe infinitely if they did not.

And indeed we muſt confeſs, that no cogent Concluſion can be drawn from the Example of all ſuch as have defended, or that now defend the Chriſtian Religion againſt Infidels. But their Reaſoning is ſtill leſs ſolid, as I ſhall ſhew after putting it in a greater Light. It is not well done to give thoſe Occaſions of ſaying, that the Defenders of the Chriſtian Religion diminiſh the Force of their Objections; and thoſe who by their ill Carriage put before them this Stone of Offence and Stumbling, deſerve to be reproached for it, not to ſpeak of revenging in this place the Wrong they do to Chriſtianity. Moreover, I have from the very beginning of this Work propos'd to my ſelf not only to deal with ſuch as entirely reject it, but with thoſe alſo who ſeem to embrace it only by halves.

Let us imagine then a cheating Prieſt, (People but too much known in all *Chriſtendom*) who pretends to ſome Benefice, if he has none already, or aſpires to a greater Dignity than what he poſſeſſes. He appears humble, gentle, moderate, and kind. He ſpeaks of nothing but Diſintereſtedneſs, and the Vanity of all the Enjoyments of this Life. If he has a Talent

lent for the Pulpit, he there principally ſhews his Zeal againſt the corrupt Manners of the Times. Nay, he's in a Fury againſt ſcandalous Clergy-men, and the Abuſes committed in Eccleſiaſtical Matters, ſo long complain'd of, and not yet reform'd. In a word, he uſes all the Diſcourſes that ſhould be made in that Place, in order to paſs for an honeſt Man, and to make the World believe, that had his Incomes been greater, he would put 'em to much better Uſes than moſt Eccleſiaſticks do.

After acting his Part for ſome Years, at laſt he obtains his end, that is, a Dignity and Income that render him conſiderable in the World and in the Church. But then it may be ſaid of him, *Quantum mutatus ab illo?* for indeed he's no longer to be known. He's forthwith haughty, hard-hearted, untractable, and paſſionate towards all ſuch as he thinks his Inferiours. Thoſe who were his Friends before, and upon whoſe Friendſhip too he valu'd himſelf, ought to be very well ſatisfy'd with him, if he now vouchſafes them a Look. The Obligations they laid upon him, while he continu'd a private Perſon, and when they expected no Returns from him, are quite loſt. He thinks they were all due to his Merit, and that more were owing him; but as for himſelf, he owes nothing to any body, and does 'em too

much Honour, when he coldly receives the Incense they are base enough to offer him. If he prefers any Man, he must be some Blockhead or Flatterer, People that have no Idea almost of their Duty, and that are ready to admire any thing, the Bad as well as the Good, so be you make 'em live at their Ease.

This Man so disinterested heretofore, becomes oftentimes insatiable, and the Revenues of the best Benefices are not sufficient to satisfy his Avarice. He procures therefore as many as he can, and has never too many. If he be naturally covetous, all that he preach'd before of Liberality is quite vanish'd, all the Invectives he made against Avarice are laid in perpetual Oblivion. He does Good to no body, and thinks of nothing but laying up Treasure. If on the contrary he be a voluptuous or stately Person, he consumes his great Incomes in keeping a magnificent Table, in having a stately Train, and living as the proudest Men, or the most addicted to their Pleasure in the World. The sordid Avarice of the one is a Frugality becoming a good Clergyman, and the excessive Luxury of the other is but an Expence absolutely necessary to keep up his Rank in the World, and to beget Respect in the Laity. Far from making the least Reformation in the Clergy that depend upon them, they let them loose

looſe to all the ill Cuſtoms and Manners to which they are ſubject, on condition they be ſubmiſſive to them, and meddle not with their particular Method of living.

When Unbelievers conſider ſuch a Conduct, they cannot help being perſwaded that theſe Prelates, even before they get thoſe Dignities which they ſo ſcandalouſly abuſe, did not believe a word of the Matter. They imagine that they were not devoted to the Church to edify it, and to lead Chriſtians to a vertuous Life by their Diſcourſes and their Example, but out of Ambition or Avarice; and that they made uſe of the Cloak of Religion to come at their ends. They likewiſe draw hence a further Conſequence, which is, that the Chriſtian Religion is not true in it ſelf, ſince Men of the firſt Order, and that make a Profeſſion of defending it, believe it not, whatever they ſay by reaſon of thoſe great Advantages they get by it.

It muſt be confeſs'd, that the Clergy who live after this manner, cannot reclaim Unbelievers, their Actions being directly contrary to their Diſcourſes. They may long enough ſay the fineſt things in the World, and uſe the moſt ſolid Reaſons; yet the Prejudice which Unbelievers imbibe from their Morals is ſo violent, that it carries it over all that can be ſaid or imagin'd.

'Tis ſtill much worſe when Clergy-men, whoſe Morals are not better, and who were preferr'd by ill Arts, without being capable of diſcharging their Office, take upon them to cenſure unbelieving Laymen. All that they can ſay ſerves for nothing elſe but to recal into the Minds of theſe Lay-men their Unworthineſs, or the Artifices they made uſe of to get Preferment; nay, and what they ſay upon ſuch Occaſions does paſs for a Continuation of their unlawful Ways. 'Tis believ'd they perſiſt in acting a part, and all the Marks they give of their Zeal procures them nothing elſe but the Reputation of being the beſt Comedians. Mens Eyes are fix'd upon their evil Actions, and their Incapacity. They think always upon their Solicitations, and the ſhameful Practices they made uſe of to come at the Dignity which they enjoy. 'Tis remember'd that they made aſſiduous Court to ſuch as could ſerve 'em, without being at the leaſt Pains, in the mean while, of acquiring the neceſſary Talents and Knowledg for diſcharging this Employment they ſo much intrigu'd for. The Flatteries they ſo liberally beſtow'd upon the Great, to whom they were ready to ſacrifice all in order to be preferr'd, are not forgotten; and there is reaſon to believe they have not chang'd their Thoughts, when they are ſeen every day as ſervile towards ſuch as are

are above them, as they are haughty towards their Inferiours.

If *Damasus* Bishop of *Rome* had endeavour'd to convert *Ammianus Marcellinus*, he had no sooner begun to speak, but this Pagan Historian would remember the way how *Damasus* was elevated to the Episcopal Dignity: Damasus *and* Ursinus, says he, *burning with an excessive Desire of obtaining the Episcopal See, oppos'd one another with so much Violence, that they and their Parties came to Blows, and to cut one another's Throats after they had sent for Arms.* Juventius *(Governour of the City) not being able to repress nor appease them, was constrained to force his way, retreating into the Suburbs.* Damasus *had the better, his Party having been very zealous in this Affair. 'Tis certain that in one day there were found in the Palace of* Sicininus, *where there is a Christian Church, an hundred and thirty seven dead Bodies; nor was it an easy Matter to pacify the People, who for a long time had been as it were in a Fury. For my part, when I consider the Splendor of the City of* Rome, *I must confess that such as aim at those things ought to oppose one another with all their Might to obtain their Desires: for after they enjoy it, they live at their Ease, they enrich themselves with the Offerings or Gifts of Women, they ride in their Chariots, they are well clad, and make Banquets so sumptuous that they exceed the Tables of Kings.* Lib. 27. c. 3

This is what *Marcellinus* writes of *Damaſus*, and which, no doubt on't, could not diſpoſe him to hear this Biſhop. The good Order and Policy that at this time is almoſt every where eſtabliſh'd, does hinder indeed the committing of ſuch Irregularities; but the ſecret and publick Brigues, the Solicitations for Men neither of Merit or Capacity, are not leſs frequent now than formerly. We ſee as many Perſons who have nothing to recommend them to Preferment, but their Diligence in making their Court to ſuch as could aſſiſt them; Perſons who have no other Talents for diſcharging the Employment they ſeek, but that of living eaſily and idly, join'd to an extreme Deſire of obtaining it. Therefore we ſhould not wonder if Clergy-men thus preferr'd encreaſe inſtead of diminiſhing the Number of the Incredulous.

Another thing which contributes much to keep up Infidelity among Chriſtians, is, not only that ſuch as profeſs the ſtudy of Religion, and of teaching it to others, are ſlight Obſervers of it themſelves; but alſo that they have often but a very confus'd Idea of it, and even in things of the greateſt Conſequence. I will give an Example of it, whereby it appears that Churchmen do violate almoſt every where one of the cleareſt Precepts of the Goſpel, as much out of Ignorance, I believe, as Paſſion. There

There is nothing ſo ſtrongly recommended in the New Teſtament as the Love of our Neighbour; and this Love conſiſts not only in helping, and being compaſſionate to him, in the things of this Life, but alſo in behaving our ſelves charitably towards him, if he be in any erroneous Opinion as to Religion, eſpecially when it has little or no Influence upon his Manners. This charitable Carriage is one of the principal Branches, ſo to ſpeak, of that general Love of our Neighbour, whom the Goſpel commands us to love as our ſelves; and it is by ſo much the more conſiderable as it has been of perpetual Uſe ſince Chriſtianity came into the World; and that it ſhall be perhaps till God thinks fit to call all Mankind to render an Account of their Actions. Chriſtians have been divided almoſt from the very Beginning into divers Opinions; they are ſo ſtill, and ſo they will continue, it may be, for ever; ſo that Charity towards ſuch as are in Error, or are look'd upon ſo to be, has been always of great Uſe, and will be ſo, for ought we know, to the end of the World. Nevertheleſs it may be ſaid, that no part of Chriſtian Theology has been ſo long neglected as this has been. 'Tis but in the laſt Age, and eſpecially in the preſent, that any Reflection has been made upon it. Nor have there been but a very few

Perſons that made it their Buſineſs, and dar'd to affirm that it was one of the principal Points of the Morals of Chriſt, in the ſtate of Ignorance wherein we live here below. Moſt of the Teachers of Religion treat with Vigour and Cruelty thoſe they look upon as erring in their Opinions, let their Morals be never ſo good, tho they commonly pardon in others crying Vices. I will not as much as ſpeak of the *Inquiſition*, whoſe cruel Maxims are abhorr'd by a conſiderable Part of Chriſtians, but of the Management obſerv'd in many Countries where it is not eſtabliſh'd. Nor will I treat expreſly here of this Queſtion, which would require a Volume as great, at leaſt, as this; I ſhall only touch as much of it as makes for my Purpoſe, without making any Digreſſions.

How is a Clergy-man treated in many Places if he forſakes the common Opinions never ſo little? If he has a Benefice, he is in great danger of loſing it, or at leaſt expos'd to the cruel Slanders of ſuch as would fain get his Place, and who are always a good Number, altho he punctually diſcharges all his Duties, and that his Morals be irreproachable. But if he be not yet preferr'd, an Opinion contrary to the receiv'd Doctrines, be it of never ſo little Conſequence, is ſufficient to exclude him for ever from all ſorts of Eccleſiaſtical

ſiaſtical Preferments. And ſo zealous are ſome about the Conformity of Opinions, that the leaſt Suſpicion is enough to do a vaſt Prejudice to any it falls upon. Nevertheleſs a great Number of Clergy-men are ſo uncharitable as to raiſe many Suſpicions againſt ſuch as they do not love. There's not a Conſequence ſo odious but they boldly draw it from their Sentiments, and accuſe them thereof to thoſe whereupon they depend; and whom they often find ſo credulous about the ill that is ſaid of their Neighbour, or ſo little inclin'd to believe the Good, that thoſe Clergy-men in many Converſations ruin for ever ſome innocent Perſons in the Opinion of ſuch as liſten to their Calumnies.

On the contrary, if a Clergy-man who is already in poſſeſſion of a Benefice, or that aims at one, be a Blockhead, idle, ſpending his time in eating and drinking, ſmoking, ſlandering; or doing ſome very ſcandalous thing, provided he be Orthodox, as they ſpeak, he quietly enjoys what he has got, or is in a condition of being preferr'd in the Church without changing his Manners. Good Men cenſure in vain his manner of Living, without objecting any thing to him except what is publick; but they are not hearkned to, and towards him alone are practis'd the Duties of that Charity which *thinketh no Evil, beareth all things* 1 Cor. 3. 5, 7.

things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

The Unbelievers who have their Eyes principally fix'd upon the Carriage of the Clergy, conclude from hence two things; the one, that good Morals, that is, the principal Duties of Christianity are the Qualities they have least regard to; and the other, that the Body of Ecclesiasticks is only a mere Faction, where the Discovery of Truth is not intended, but to support by all ways what can procure or preserve their temporal Interests. The Incredulous add further, that the Candidates or Pretenders to the Benefices look upon them as a Prey whereupon they may seize whenever they are vacant; or which they may forcibly snatch from such as possess 'em by whatever Means they can. They conclude that the end of all this Zeal affected for the Doctrines is no other thing but a good Income, and that they would not vouchsafe even to inform themselves about those Doctrines, if this Income were not settled only upon such as should.

'Tis in vain for the Clergy to say the contrary to Unbelievers; the constant Practice of so many Ages and Nations makes more Impression upon them than all the Discourse that can be made to them. From hence it is that they come to consider Christianity it self as they do the falsest Religions, and so die in an incurable

ble Infidelity; by their own Fault, it's true; but also by a specious occasion of judging wrong, which several Clergy-men give 'em.

They are by so much the more confirm'd in their Infidelity, as they see the Zeal for Temporals very different from that concerning Spirituals. And this they easily discover by the Distinction that is made of those who defend and are passionate for the temporal Interests of their Party; and of them, who, defending Christianity by the strongest Reasons imaginable, and after the best Method of clearing Peoples Understanding, deny not but that there are some Disorders in the Discipline of the Church which need Reformation. Those last who ought to be esteem'd and advanc'd by such whose Profession obliges to favour them, are put back for ever, and look'd upon as very dangerous Persons, whilst the first are in favour all the while, and are sure to obtain what they desire.

The Incredulous judg by this Conduct that it is not Christianity in general they mind, whatever they say, but the temporal Interests of the Party; since those who consecrate themselves for the Defence and Propagation of the first are disgrac'd, and no Reward is thought too great for others.

These

These are the principal Prejudices which Ecclesiasticks by their Fault occasion Unbelievers to entertain. I could add several things much more home upon them, if I would speak of all the Abuses committed in the Places where Christianity is most corrupted; but if what I have mention'd does an extraordinary Injury to Religion, what may we not say of the rest? And besides, the Answer I design to make to these Prejudices, may solve the Difficulties which might proceed from greater Disorders than those whereof I have spoken.

To shew that the Occasions of Scandal and Stumbling which are given to the Incredulous, and of which we have been now speaking, ought not to injure Christianity in general, and that consequently they should not hinder any from acknowledging its Truth; it must be consider'd in it self, and in its first Original. If there have been Additions made to it, and if it has been since corrupted, that is no Defect in Christianity, but their Fault who made these Additions or Alterations.

Those who have read the Gospel, and the other Writings of the Apostles, cannot say that the first Founders of the Christian Religion have engag'd such as would preach it to discharge this Duty from any Consideration of Interest. Jesus Christ promises nothing but Persecutions and Mi-

series

feries in this World to the first Ministers of the Gospel: *I send you forth*, says he, *as Sheep among Wolves. They will bring you into their Synagogues, and scourge you. You shall be brought for my sake before Governours and Kings. The Brother shall deliver the Brother to Death, and the Father the Child; and the Children shall rise up against their Parents, and cause them to be put to Death; and you shall be hated of all Men for my Name's sake.* He also says unto one of his Apostles, whom he call'd after an extraordinary manner; *I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my Name's sake.* Mat. 10. 16. Acts 9. 16.

The Event did quickly convince the Apostles that these Predictions of Jesus Christ were not vain. The Jews and the Heathens, for the most part, gave them a very ill Reception; and many of Christ's first Disciples suffer'd Death for discharging the Function wherewith their Master honour'd them. It cannot be said therefore that it was Interest which engag'd them in it, or that confirm'd them in their first Undertaking. Had Jesus Christ made a considerable Provision for such as would preach his Gospel (as he might, and his Doctrine be never the falser) it must be confess'd that it would have been somewhat difficult to shew Unbelievers that the Apostles did not act at all by any Interest, and we should want a most considerable Proof of their Sincerity, and consequently

ly of the Truth of thoſe Matters of Fact which they preach'd. Herein we have Matter of praiſing Divine Providence that has taken ſuch Care about the firſt eſtabliſhing of the Goſpel, as to prevent thoſe diſadvantageous Suſpicions which People might nouriſh concerning any Eſtabliſhment like the preſent State of Chriſtianity. If Jeſus Chriſt himſelf had enjoy'd all the Conveniences of Life; as if he had been exalted, for example, upon the temporal Throne of the Family of *David*, from whom he was deſcended; then his Morals, as fine as they are, and even the Sanctity of his Life had never made any Impreſſions upon Mens Minds; becauſe, when any great temporal Advantage is join'd to Vertue, or made the Reward of it, we eaſily ſuſpect then that ſuch as adhere to it are more influenc'd by this Advantage than by Vertue it ſelf.

Since that time the Chriſtian Religion being well eſtabliſh'd, the Piety of its Profeſſors has not only provided for the Subſiſtence of thoſe who ſucceeded in the Apoſtolick Functions; but alſo, conſidering all Places, for their Conveniences, and a conſiderable Expence in which they were engag'd. As ſoon as Perſons of Quality became Chriſtians, and that the Emperors themſelves embrac'd it, it was thought fit that the principal Guides of the Church ſhould live in ſome Splendor, without which

which they must become contemptible, and unable not only to keep up their Respect with the People, but likewise with Kings, and Men of the first Order. To consider Mankind such as it is now, and ever will be, and not such as it ought to be, it is evident that this Settlement was necessary after Christianity became the governing Religion.

Upon this it happen'd that many of those who aim'd at Ecclesiastical Dignities did look upon them as mere temporal Settlements, whereby they might live great. But the Worldliness of those People cannot, without Injustice, be attributed to the Christian Religion, nor to the Founders of it, as I have shewn. Nor can they be blam'd neither, who have augmented the Dignity and Revenues of Church-men, because they did it with a good Design, and that it is possible enough for such as enjoy those Dignities and Revenues, to make a better Use of them than most do. If after making as modest Expences as can be for the external Part, they spend the rest of their Revenues to some good Purposes; where is the harm of this? Is there any Law in being that prohibits it? No surely; neither is there any thing that hinders them from being obliging, humble, and moderate, or from remembring their former Condition before they came to these Dignities. Who would not heap

Com-

Commendations upon them, if they did ſo manage themſelves that it might appear as much as poſſible that it was not to ſatisfy their Avarice, or any other Paſſion, they endeavour'd to obtain the Dignities aforeſaid; but to edify the Church more, and to lead the People to Piety and Charity by their Example, which is of much greater Efficacy than their Diſcourſes? Have there not been in divers Places and Times ſome Clergy-men that behav'd themſelves after this manner, and who drew upon themſelves the Reſpect and Admiration of the whole World. Such were the Biſhops whereof *Ammianus Marcellinus* ſpeaks immediately after giving that Deſcription of thoſe Biſhops of *Rome* which I mention'd before. His Teſtimony is of ſo much greater Weight as he was a Heathen, and ſhews every where clear Tokens of his Sincerity. *They might*, ſays he, *be really happy, if deſpiſing the Grandeur of the City of* Rome, *wherein they conceal'd their Vices, they had imitated the way of Living of ſome Prelates in the Provinces whom the Frugality of their Tables, the Simplicity of their Habit, and their Eyes always fix'd upon the Ground, did render acceptable to God, and to his true Worſhippers, as vertuous and modeſt Perſons.* Therefore it is unjuſtly done of Unbelievers to attribute to the old or modern Chriſtianity the Faults of thoſe who abuſe the Eccleſiaſtical Dignities; and to con-

conclude from hence the Falſity of the Chriſtian Religion is the worſt Reaſoning that can be.

The ſame thing may be anſwer'd to the Objections of Unbelievers drawn from the ſcandalous manner after which ſeveral Clergy-men have been preferr'd, and ſpend the Revenues deſtin'd by their Founders for Men fit to edify the Church. If they make a mere Trade of theſe Employments, and look upon their Revenues as Penſions granted to their Importunities or Flatteries, is this either the Fault of the Religion it ſelf, or of the Founders of thoſe Benefices? Do we not ſee many vertuous Clergy-men who have been advanc'd only by their Merit, and that make an excellent Uſe of their Dignities and Revenues?

'True it is indeed, that thoſe who abuſe them are not proper Perſons to cure the Incredulous of their Prejudices, and that, far from edifying ſuch as know them, they cannot fail almoſt, conſidering Mens Diſpoſitions, of corrupting or ſcandalizing them. 'Tis the Duty therefore of all good Men to provide a Remedy againſt this Diſgrace of the Chriſtian Religion, and to ſtop the Mouths of Unbelievers.

If the Author of the Chriſtian Religion, or thoſe who firſt ſpread it throughout all the World, had order'd their Diſciples to ſuffer no Diverſity of Opinions, not

even in things that are not essential, and to persecute those who would not in every thing follow the Sentiments of the greatest Number; the Libertines might then questionless justly attribute to them all the sad Consequences that proceed from that intolerating Principle whereof some Divines make Profession. But 'tis just the contrary; the Founders of the Christian Religion recommend nothing so much as Moderation and Charity in such Dissensions.

The Jews and the Heathens that were converted to Christianity agreed not well with one another in the Days of the Apostles. The Jews, among other things, would have the Gentiles observe the Distinction of Meats which the Levitical Law introduc'd, and condemn'd all those who refus'd to do it. The Gentiles, who knew that God requir'd this Observation only from the Jews, and that too but whilst they had a separate Government to themselves, deny'd Submission to this Yoke, and laugh'd at the Superstition of the Jews. Now what did the Apostles in this Affair? What Counsel does St. *Paul* give his Disciples? Do they say that the one must follow the Practice and Opinions of the other in all things, under pain of Excommunication? Do they order the Christian Church to persecute, as soon as she could be able, all those whose Sentiments

ments ſhould in any thing differ from the Majority? Nothing leſs than all this: For the Apoſtles divide the Controverſy, as it were; and will have both the Parties to have a Condeſcenſion for one another. They do not enjoin the Jews to eat without ſcruple the Fleſh of thoſe Creatures prohibited in their Law; nor do they on the other hand ſubject the Gentiles to the Superſtition of the Jews. They only command them, *to abſtain from Meats offer'd to Idols, and from Blood, and from things ſtrangl'd*; becauſe the Jews were exceedingly offended to ſee thoſe who believ'd in Jeſus Chriſt, and kept Company with the Apoſtles, eat ſuch things, whereof they thought the Uſe forbidden all Mankind. They declare, *that it ſeem'd good to the Holy Ghoſt and to them, to lay upon them no greater Burden than thoſe neceſſary things.* St. *Paul*, after telling the Corinthians, *that no Man can lay any other Foundation than what is already laid, which is Jeſus Chriſt*, adds, *That if any Man builds upon this Foundation Gold, Silver, precious Stones,* (that is, true Doctrines) *Wood, Hay, Stubble,* (that is to ſay falſe Doctrines, tho not deſtroying the Foundation) *the Fire ſhall try every Man's Work; and that if any Man's Work abide, he ſhall receive a Reward; but that if any Man's Work ſhall be burnt, he ſhall indeed ſuffer Loſs, but yet ſhall be ſav'd ſo as by Fire.* In his Epiſtle to the *Romans*,

Acts 15. 29.

1 Cor. 3. 11, &c.

Rom. 14. 1, &c. where he ſpeaks diſtinctly of that Controverſy decided by the Apoſtles, hear what Advice he gives them; *Him that is weak in the Faith receive, but not to doubtful Diſputations: for one believeth that he may eat all things, another who is weak eateth Herbs. Let not him that eateth deſpiſe him that eateth not, for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgeſt another Man's Servant? To his own Maſter he ſtandeth or falleth; yea he ſhall be holden up; for God is able to make him ſtand*; that is, to keep him from being led by Weakneſs into fundamental Errors. St. *Paul* adds ſeveral things upon the ſame Subject, which now I ſhall not relate; but all that he ſays does clearly ſuppoſe that we muſt bear with one another in ſuch things as deſtroy not the Foundation, that is, which do not hinder us from putting our Truſt in Jeſus Chriſt, or keeping his Commandments.

Now if after all this, other Maxims are obſerv'd in our time, they cannot be attributed to the Apoſtles, nor conſequently be look'd upon as Doctrines of the Chriſtian Religion. Whatever Imputations they may be liable to who violate this Branch of Charity relating to the Erroneous, (for they give too great Occaſions of Reflection) yet theſe diſadvantageous Characters cannot ſtain the Chriſtian Religion.

It is no way needful for me to prove, that according to the Notions of the Go-

ſpel,

ſpel, the Care of the ſpiritual Part is incomparably above that of the temporal. The whole Syſtem of the Chriſtian Religion ſpeaks no other Language; and therefore they deſerve much more Eſteem who endeavour to extirpate Infidelity and Vices, than they who defend the temporal Intereſts of Chriſtianity; for the firſt are infinitely more uſeful to the Church than the latter. Wherefore if ſome convert the Intereſt of Religion to that of a Party, they muſt be blam'd, and not the Religion which wholly condemns this Practice.

CHAP. IV.

That the Diviſions reigning among Chriſtians ſhould not hinder any from believing that the Chriſtian Religion is true.

WE learn from Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory, that from the very Deceaſe of the Apoſtles, nay and during their Lives too, the Chriſtians begun to be divided into Parties. But it was principally in the ſecond Age that a world of Sects grew up which tore Chriſtianity into pieces after a moſt ſcandalous manner; and ſince that time one Sect has conſtantly ſucceeded another, ſo that it may be ſaid

the Chriſtian Church was never without Diviſions. What is yet worſe is, that moſt of thoſe Sects mutually condemn one another. Each of them pretends that there is no Salvation for ſuch as embrace not the Doctrines they teach. I need not enter upon Particulars, or bring diſtinct Proofs of theſe Diviſions and Anathemas; for they are Matters of Fact but too well known to all the World.

From hence Unbelievers take an occaſion of ſaying that the Chriſtian Religion is like all others, and that if it had come from Heaven, as 'tis ſaid to do, Chriſtians would be better agreed than they are found to be. The ſame God, ſay they, who gave it to Men, would take care to prevent thoſe Diviſions that extremely leſſen the Effects of it. On the contrary, it ſeems to be the Apple of Diſcord, which no ſooner appear'd in the World, but it caus'd numberleſs Diviſions. They add, that this keeps Infidels and ſuch as have been educated in other Religions from embracing it: for not knowing which of thoſe Sects it is that teaches the true Chriſtianity, and being not in a condition to examine them all, they are at a loſs how to determine the Affair. They ask further of ſuch as write for the Truth of Chriſtianity, as I do now, which Chriſtian Religion it is we defend; whether it be that which the Roman Church profeſſes,

or

or that of any of the other Sects that make a ſeparate Body? There is not, ſay they, any Chriſtianity in general, and therefore you muſt determine for ſome of the Parties; which is it then you have undertaken to defend?

There are another ſort of People whoſe Conduct is not more prudent than that of the Incredulous, and who after another manner abuſe the Diviſions which reign among Chriſtians. They ſay, that not being capable to examine all theſe different Sentiments, they find no Method more ſure than implicitly to embrace the Religion of the Country wherein they live, ſince they muſt needs be of ſome Party. The Incredulous reject all the different Opinions of Chriſtians, as equally ungrounded by reaſon of their Diviſions; and ſuch as ſay that without any Examination they believe the Religion of their Country, know not well themſelves what they profeſs to believe, and are expoſed to almoſt as much Danger of miſtaking as the Incredulous: for, in ſhort, to reject all Opinions, and to embrace, not knowing why, the firſt Opinion that offers it ſelf, is much the ſame thing. At bottom the latter are not a greater Honour to Chriſtianity than the firſt, ſeeing they both of them ſuppoſe it deſtitute of any Marks to diſtinguiſh it from Error or Impoſture; therefore I thought it neceſſary

to examine in this Chapter the Conduct of the one and the other.

To begin with the Incredulous, and to answer their Objections in the same Order that I alledg'd them, I absolutely deny that it follows from the Divisions of Christians, that the Christian Religion is not divinely reveal'd. If the Christians could produce a Promise from the Founder of their Religion, assuring them that they should never be divided, then the Reasoning of the Incredulous might pretend to some Force; they could say that this Promise not being perform'd, it was a sign it did not proceed from God. But Matters are quite contrary; Jesus Christ and his Disciples considering the Dispositions of Men, and foreseeing likewise future Events, have clearly prophesy'd of the Divisions that should spring up among Christians. *Suppose you*, says Jesus Christ, *that I am come to give Peace on Earth? I tell you, nay; but rather Division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one House divided, three against two, and two against three*, &c. *There must be Heresies among you*, says St. *Paul, that they which are approv'd may be also made manifest among you.* Here are express Words signifying that Jesus Christ and his Apostles were not ignorant of the Divisions, which the Christian Religion ill understood, or rather the Passions of Men would occasion among Christians.

Luke 12. 51.

1 Cor. 11. 19.

But

But ſome may ſay, that it is a thing unworthy of a Religion reveal'd from Heaven to cauſe ſo many Diviſions, eſpecially having ſuch fatal Effects. I grant this, if it be ſuppoſed that this Religion does of it ſelf inſpire the Spirit of Diviſion and Diſorder; but if it be only the innocent occaſion of them, there can be no ill Conſequence drawn from hence againſt it. Now it cannot be doubted, but that Chriſtianity is directly oppoſite to the Diviſions of Chriſtians, ſince Jeſus Chriſt preſſes no Commandment ſo ſtrongly as that of our loving one another, and conſequently of living peaceably one towards another. Every one knows this. Chriſt however knew ſo perfectly the Heart of Man, that he ſaw very well *the new Command of loving one another*, which he left his Diſciples, ſhould not be well obey'd; and that his Doctrine, as peaceable as it was, would frequently ſerve for a Pretence to the Paſſions of Men in occaſioning infinite Broils; ſo that if his Deſign were to be explain'd by the Event, it might be certainly ſaid he came to bring Diviſions on the Earth. This is the Senſe of thoſe Words I cited a little above. John 13. 33, 34. & 15. 12, 17, &c.

But what, ſome will ſay? Does it not ſeem a thing becoming God, for the Honour of Religion and for the Good of Men, to prevent its producing any Diſorders, not even by Accident? No ſurely, God ought

ought not to intervene by the extraordinary Effects of his Power to keep the Peace among Christians. The Reason of this is, that his Design, as it appears both by Revelation and the thing it self, was by no means to bring Men, at least ordinarily, to his Obedience by Miracles of this nature; but only by Laws to which he fix'd Rewards and Punishments, as I have already said in * another Place. This is what St. *Paul* hinted to in one word in that Passage I cited before, when he says, *That there must be Heresies, that they which are approved may be also made manifest.* This plainly signifies that if God by extraordinary means would hinder all Divisions about his Doctrine among Christians, it should be no longer a Vertue to remain stedfast on the good side, or to quit the bad in order to join it. Those who love the Truth, and keep to it out of Choice and Knowledg, would be confounded with those who should embrace it without knowing why, and who are as ready to embrace an Error, were they taught it. The constant Profession of the Truth could not expect any Reward, since it would not be in any ones Power to forsake it. In a word, it would be superfluous to propose any Laws at all to Men, since it could not be in their Power to violate them; for God, according to our Adversaries Supposition, would prevent this by his Omnipotency.

* Part 1. Ch. 3.

But

But it will be ſaid perhaps that a wiſe Legiſlator who foreſees that his Laws may be ill underſtood, or cauſe Diviſion ſhould he expreſs them obſcurely, would take care to uſe very clear Expreſſions; and that God, who foreſees all things, ought by Conſequence to expreſs his Will in ſo clear a manner as to prevent all the Diſputes which we ſee now among Chriſtians. To this I anſwer, that God has expreſs'd himſelf plainly enough in the Writings of the Apoſtles, eſpecially about what is neceſſary to be believ'd, hop'd, and done, to obtain Salvation according to the Laws of the Goſpel; and that there would be no Diſputes about Neceſſaries if Men did content themſelves with the Scripture-Notions. What made Diviſions ſpring among Chriſtians are the Additions and ill-drawn Conſequences, and not the Text of the New Teſtament. Such as look in it only for the Truth, they eaſily find this, and are never deceiv'd about any thing eſſential; but thoſe who would find therein what vain Subtlety and humane Intereſts or Paſſions have added to it, are apt, I confeſs, to be deceived every moment. In a word, to all ſincere Perſons who love the Truth preferably to every other thing, the Goſpel is as clear as the Sun, and cannot occaſion any conſiderable Diſpute: But to Men govern'd by their Paſſions, and conceited of their Prejudices, the moſt evi-

evident things in the World are obſcure. There is no Law ſo clear, but a Wrangler may raiſe a thouſand Difficulties about it; and if a Legiſlator ſhould not paſs for a wiſe Man, except he expreſly prevented all poſſible Difficulties, and mark'd all the Caſes wherein ill-diſpoſed Perſons would abuſe his Laws, there had never been any Legiſlator to whom any Wiſdom could be attributed. None ever undertook to perform ſuch a thing, becauſe then they would be oblig'd to write an infinite Number of Volumes, to which ſomething new muſt be added every Moment, ſince there might happen infinite Caſes every day. Therefore if God had deſign'd to prevent all thoſe Controverſies already mov'd, or that ſhall hereafter ariſe about the Senſe of Revelation, and rejected by Name all poſſible Errors, he muſt have made ſo great a Number of Volumes, that, to uſe St. *John*'s Expreſſion, *the World could not contain them*, and their Multitude would render them uſeleſs.

For proof that the cleareſt Laws, and the moſt proper to prevent all ſorts of Diſorders, become obſcure to ſuch as are not diſpos'd to obſerve them; we need only call to mind what is already ſaid of the Charity to be us'd towards thoſe who are in an Error about any Article of Religion. It was not poſſible to ſpeak more clearly or effectually upon this Head than the

the Apoſtles have done: and nevertheleſs the moſt part of Chriſtians practiſe at this time what they ought to have done if they had ſaid juſt the contrary. Thus they diſpute about the Senſe of the Revelation, rather becauſe they are blinded by Prejudices, and willing to diſpute, than becauſe it is in it ſelf obſcure with regard to neceſſary Doctrines; and God was not oblig'd by any means to condemn expreſly all poſſible Errors to prevent Diſputes, as I have now ſhewn.

The Diviſions that are among Chriſtians, ſhould not hinder the Incredulous or Infidels from giving them the hearing when they exhort them to embrace the Chriſtian Religion. The Reaſon of this is, that all Chriſtians, notwithſtanding their Diviſions, are agreed about certain Articles, by the Examination whereof Unbelievers muſt neceſſarily begin; and not by thoſe particular Controverſies which divide Chriſtians. All Chriſtians are agreed about the Creation of the World, about Revelation in general, the moral Precepts of the Goſpel, with the Rewards and Puniſhments annex'd to them. They agree likewiſe about the Hiſtory of the Goſpel, the Divine Miſſion of Jeſus Chriſt and his Apoſtles, the Reſurrection, and laſt Judgment. Theſe are the things they undertake to prove firſt, when they deal with Infidels or Unbelievers;

vers; and this is what with common Conſent they call the Principles of Chriſtianity, which they prove all with like Reaſons.

'Tis juſt with Religion as with ſeveral other Sciences in which the Learned are not leſs divided. There are very great Diſputes, for example, among the Phyſicians, about the Cauſes of Diſeaſes, the Virtues of Remedies, and the way of applying them; but, maugre all their Conteſts, there are certain things wherein they all agree. In Anatomy, in the Deſcription of the Symptoms of Diſeaſes, in the Knowledg of Simples, and in Chymiſtry there are a thouſand things whereof no body doubts, and which are the moſt important Parts of Phyſick, with which a Learner of this Science muſt firſt begin. And 'tis ſo, as I have already ſaid, with the different Sects of Chriſtianity. As the Diverſity in the Opinions of Phyſicians keeps none that has a mind to it from examining the Principles of their Art; ſo the Difference of Sentiments in Religion cannot diſcourage the Lovers of Truth: and indeed, as we have ſhewn in the firſt Part, they are other ſorts of Motives which take off the Incredulous from examining it.

What I have call'd *the Principles of Chriſtianity*, is the ſame thing with what we may name, *Chriſtianity in general*. Altho there

there be no Christian Society that comprehends all its Belief within those Ideas only about which all Christians are agreed; yet this hinders not but that those Ideas may include the fundamental Doctrines of Christianity, and that we must be determin'd about these before we examine any particular Doctrine of those Societies which profess our Religion. This is also what I undertake to defend in this Work, and from the Truth or Falshood whereof depends all the rest. If it be acknowledg'd, for instance, that these general Doctrines are true, we must then examine in what Society they are most purely taught: but were they found to be false, then we needed not examine any particular Sect; seeing that all defending the same general Principles, if they were not true, then all the Sects would be all equally false.

It is manifest then that the Divisions of Christians ought not to be any Prejudice against Christianity in general, nor hinder the Incredulous from examining it. Nor is it less certain that they cannot take any Person off from this Examen, that has a mind to embrace any one Sect. The Divisions indeed render this Disquisition somewhat difficult, but by no means impossible. I shall be told, no doubt, that this is true with respect to Men of Letters or understanding Persons; but the Question is, what the ignorant Populace must do

do in these Divisions? As they are commonly judg'd incapable of this Disquisition; so the surest way for them, some think, is to engage with the first Party that offers it self.

To this I answer, first, That to pass for a good Christian one must know, at least, those general Principles we spoke of. If there be People so stupid as to comprehend nothing of 'em, tho otherwise Men of good Morals, we leave the Disposal of them to God; but, as I said in another Place, they differ very little from the Savages of *America* or *Africa*.

Secondly, If such as have Parts enough to comprehend the Principles of the Christian Religion, and Vertue enough to frame their Morals according to this Model, are not able however to take Cognizance of those Differences which divide Christians; it is not very difficult to determine what they must do both in Equity and Prudence. They ought not to judg of what they do not understand. They ought neither to approve or condemn any Party concerning the Doctrines in Dispute. He that requires more of them, makes them pass the Limits of their Understanding, and obliges them to form an unjust and hasty Judgment. While they find themselves uncapable to receive true Information of the Reasons on all sides, or to distinguish certainly which is in the

wrong,

wrong, they ought to ſuſpend their Judgments about Controverſies. 'Tis a Rule authoriz'd by common Senſe not to judg of what we do not underſtand; nor can we believe, without renouncing common Senſe, that God would have any body acquieſce without good Reaſons for it. St. *Paul* tells us, that *whatever is not of Faith* (or Perſwaſion) *is Sin*; that is, that before we reſolve to act in point of Religion (for this is what he there treats of) we muſt be perſwaded that we are in the right: but this we cannot be, unleſs we evidently know why. Rom. 14. 23.

It will be ſaid perhaps that God may be pleas'd with this Cautiouſneſs and Moderation, but that Men will not bear it, ſince they commonly oblige thoſe that live in the ſame Society with them to declare for all their Doctrines. Notwithſtanding whatever is requir'd of Men, it is certain that they keep to this Wariness whereof I ſpoke; becauſe they are luckily uncapable of underſtanding ſuch Controverſies as divide Chriſtians; altho they eaſily comprehend the Ground of Chriſtianity, which is ſuted to all ſorts of Capacities that are not quite deſtitute of their reaſoning Faculty about what makes no Impreſſion upon the Senſes. Thoſe People giving little Attention to what they do not underſtand, apply themſelves wholly to what they comprehend. Thus

they leave their Controverſies to Divines, whilſt they mind only the Eſſentials of Chriſtianity. Such as are not more knowing, and yet venture further in their Opinions, and act accordingly, do judg and act manifeſtly againſt common Prudence and natural Equity. To imagine that God would have any Regard to ſo unreaſonable a Conduct, is to extinguiſh the moſt certain Light of Reaſon or Religion.

In the third place, if it be ſuppos'd that ſuch as cannot enter into the Detail of Controverſies have nevertheleſs a little more Knowledg than thoſe I have deſcrib'd, then they may eaſily determine themſelves after this manner, without running any risk at all. By reading Confeſſions of Faith they may learn wherein all Parties in *Chriſtendom* agree, and take that for the Foundation and Ground of Religion; becauſe it is not likely that ſo many different Parties who diſpute ſo eagerly againſt one another, ſhould agree in acknowledging certain Heads as the true Doctrines of Chriſtianity, if they were not ſuch in effect. By the different Parties of *Chriſtendom* I underſtand not all the Sects that ever have been, but ſuch as ſubſiſt at this time. The greateſt Part of the old Sects are unknown to us; and if we may judg of them by what we read in Hiſtory, moſt of them did maintain ſuch extravagant Poſitions, or led ſuch blame-

ful

ful Lives, that it was no difficult thing to discover their Errors. If to this they add the reading of the New Testament, they will be entirely confirm'd in this Point. But if after all this any would oblige them to approve or condemn beyond what they understand, or what they learnt in the New Testament, and from the unanimous Consent of all Christians, they may desire to be rightly inform'd concerning those things. And if such Informations be so obscure that they cannot understand them, after all possible Application on their part; or if they plainly perceive that they are repugnant to that general Idea of Christianity which they found before, then they cannot look upon them but as false or suspected, or at least as unnecessary. But if they be not permitted to judg according to their Knowledg, nor to search after Truth, they must retire into those Places where they may freely do it, rather than to live against the Light of their Consciences.

I shall not enlarge more upon this Subject; and 'tis an easy Task to infer from what I have here said the necessary Consequences to answer all Questions that may be made hereupon. It is sufficient for me rightly to conclude, that the Divisions of Christians cannot engage a reasonable Person either implicitely to embrace the first

Party that offers it ſelf, or to reject all the Chriſtian Religion.

CHAP. V.

That the Incredulous object in vain, that Chriſtianity being ſo little known, and ſo ill obſerv'd, is not ſo uſeful to Mankind as a Religion reveal'd by God in favour of all Men ought to be.

IT is a Doctrine generally receiv'd among Chriſtians, that the Chriſtian Religion is not reveal'd for any one People, or any peculiar Places, but for all Nations, and the whole Earth. And this is certainly the Doctrine of Chriſt and his Apoſtles. Hereupon the Incredulous make two Objections: The firſt is, that there are a great many Nations to whom the Goſpel has not been yet preach'd, and who live ſtill in a profound Ignorance. The other is, that among Chriſtians themſelves every Party affirms that Chriſtianity is not ſo well known as it ſhould be among the reſt. Thus moſt Men know nothing of it, and a great part of ſuch as heard of it underſtand it ſo little, if you believe the reſt, that it ſignifies nothing at all to them. The Incredulous are of opinion that Providence ſhould have

have order'd this Matter better; but we can eaſily anſwer theſe Difficulties.

Jeſus Chriſt and his Apoſtles have indeed taught us that the Chriſtian Religion was not as the Jewiſh, and that it ſhould be preach'd to all Nations; but they ſaid no where that this ſhould happen all of a ſudden, or in a few Ages. They have not excluded any People from the Knowledg of the Goſpel, or from the Worſhip which God requires of Men, as the Jewiſh Religion did, which was given only to the Jews, and could not be entirely obſerv'd by any that did not live in *Paleſtine*. But they did not ſay, that at a certain time the Goſpel ſhould be ſpread over all the Earth, ſtrictly taken, that is, in both the Hemiſpheres; and that all the People of the World would acknowledg the Creator of Heaven and Earth for their God, and Jeſus Chriſt alone for their Saviour, their Prieſt, and their King. They cannot therefore be blam'd if the Goſpel is not yet known to all Men. This Objection does no more concern them, than if they were charg'd with the Ignorance of ſuch as liv'd before the Coming of Chriſt. For as God did not think fit to ſend Jeſus Chriſt ſooner, ſo he was not yet willing, it may be, that all People ſhould know him. However there are no People to whom he has not been gracious enough to expect their thankful Returns, tho he has

been more kind to one than to another. There is no Injustice in this, provided he requires no more than he has given; I mean if he judges all Nations according to their Portions of Knowledg, as he infallibly will do.

It might be said perhaps, that if the Gospel be not yet made known to all the World, it is the Fault of Christians. Some of 'em think of quite another thing, besides imparting their Knowledg to those People who live yet in Ignorance. They are at immense Expences to satisfy their Desires, or to make War upon one another; but would not be at a very moderate one to declare the Gospel to such as are ignorant of it. The hope of Gain makes them run to the end of the World, and hazard all in order to be rich; but they will not put themselves to the least Inconvenience to carry the Gospel where it is not. Nevertheless God's Command of doing it to the Apostles extends to all Christians, as I could easily prove. Others who seem more sensible of this Command of Christ do send indeed a great number of Missionaries whithersoever they can. But without blaming their Intention, which is undoubtedly good consider'd in general, it may be justly said that a great Number of those Missionaries are not themselves Masters enough of Christianity to convert true Disciples for Jesus Christ

Christ among the Heathens. They frequently carry with them the Spirit of Lying, and never gain those People but by imposing upon them. Instead of the plain Principles of the Christian Religion, and the admirable Maxims of its Morals, they teach 'em a thousand useless, not to say false things, and an infinite Number of vain or frivolous Practices which have no relation with Charity at all. We ought not therefore to wonder if the Gospel has not any great Success, seeing those whom God has commanded to spread it, either wholly neglect this Precept, or not duly perform it. Men are to be blam'd then, and not God, who has given them excellent Laws, but not constrain'd them to Obedience.

But Unbelievers pretend that Providence should have look'd to this by extraordinary Means, and not vainly expect from Christians the execution of those Orders, which, according to us, were given so long a time since, tho not hitherto observ'd as they ought. To this I answer, besides what I have already said of God's Liberty to dispose of his Favours as he pleases, that the Conduct of Providence ought not to be judg'd of by what is past. The Time may come perhaps when Divine Worship shall be paid to none, except the Creator of the Universe, and no other Doctrine be acknowledg'd but that of Je-

sus Christ. This time likewise may be infinitely longer than what is past since the Creation, and the Ages of Ignorance not go but for a very few Years in comparison of the times of Light; so that the Duration of God's Beneficence in this regard shall be infinitely more considerable, than were those Ages wherein he seems to some to have neglected the greatest part of Mankind.

The Christian Religion does teach us, that one day the present State of Men upon this Earth shall be entirely chang'd, and that they must give an account of their Actions to be rewarded or punish'd accordingly; but we are not inform'd when this time shall be: and such as thought it should happen soon after the Coming of Christ, from some obscure Expression of him or his Apostles, were altogether mistaken, as we see now. He *before whom a thousand Years are but as one day, whose Anger endureth but for a Moment, but in whose Favour is Life*, may have Prospects infinitely more extended, and which require a great deal more time. We whose Lives are short, and who look upon the future as a thing not relating to us; we, I say, grow impatient, and the Ardor of our Desires makes us think the time yet longer than it is: but God who changes not, and that sees all Time as present, considers things after quite another manner than we

2 Pet. 3. 8. Psal. 30. 5.

do,

do, and looks upon all limited Durations as moſt ſhort. We muſt not therefore judg of Providence by that ſmall time which is paſt ſince the Creation, ſeeing in the Eternity that follows it, he may chooſe what Space he pleaſes to beſtow liberal Favours upon all Nations.

This indeed is but a Conjecture, but it muſt be granted that it contains nothing, except what agrees very well with that great Idea which the Chriſtian Religion as well as our own Reaſon gives us of the Goodneſs of God and his eternal Duration. Nothing demonſtrative can be alledg'd againſt this Notion, and Unbelievers cannot ſuppoſe it to be falſe without they prove it ſo.

What has been ſaid is ſufficient to ſolve their ſecond Objection, grounded upon that little Knowledg of true Chriſtianity wherewith Chriſtians reproach one another. 'Tis through the Fault of Men that this happens, and God does not ordinarily oppoſe it otherwiſe than by Laws accompanied with Rewards and Puniſhments. But ſome People there are who believe that God will one day reform Chriſtianity after an extraordinary manner. This might well be; but ſuppoſe it ſhould never happen, we muſt remember that there is no Sect of any Conſideration ſo corrupted, but that the Eſſence of Chriſtianity is preſerv'd among 'em, altho the

Addi-

Additions made by ſeveral of them ſtrangely disfigure it. Such as keep only to theſe eſſential Points, (which is all that may be eaſily underſtood) and who leave the reſt to the Schools, have a juſt Idea enough of Religion, and cannot be ſaid not to underſtand all that is neceſſary to Salvation. The Reproaches of Controvertiſts fall rather upon the Preachers than upon thoſe upright and ſincere Perſons, who take of Religion as much as they underſtand, and live conformably to their Notions.

Unbelievers make another Objection againſt Religion, which at firſt ſight appears difficult to anſwer; and it is, that the moſt clear and eſſential Precepts of Chriſtianity are very little obſerv'd among Chriſtians: whence the Incredulous infer, that it has not a ſufficient Influence upon Mens Lives for a Religion maintain'd to be reveal'd from God, and that conſequently it is not originally Divine. This Conſequence is very falſe, as I ſhall ſhew: But I think it material, before I do this, to enlarge a little upon the Diſorders of Chriſtianity; becauſe in effect the beſt Anſwer we can make to Unbelievers, and the propereſt to get them over to us, is to acknowledg frankly that we are greatly to blame in not better obſerving the Commands of Chriſt, and to endeavour for the future to reform our Manners.

Where-

Whereas the Christian Religion obliges us to think frequently of God, to wean us from the Vanities of this Life, and to teach us our Duties contain'd in his Laws, that we may obey them, by reason of the great Rewards and terrible Punishments annex'd to them; the quite contrary is commonly practis'd among Christians. God is rarely thought of, and Christians are almost as much blinded and possess'd with Avarice, Ambition, or the Love of Pleasure, as those People to whom the Gospel is unknown, altho there be some Difference as to the manner of their giving themselves up to these Passions. There is a Diversity, I grant, in their Customs; but the three Passions I nam'd are the Soul of almost all Christians Actions, as well as of those of the Heathens. Men are as much intoxicated among us with the Vanities of this Life, as among them; and the Pride or Insolence of Riches are not much less in *Europe* than in the midst of *Asia*. Christians study the Art of satisfying their Passions, and apply themselves so wholly to it, as if God had promis'd eternal Happiness to them for so doing, and threatn'd those with Damnation that would spend their time in the study of his Will, or regulate their Manners according to his Laws.

'Tis true that they spend some time at Church, that they say some Prayers, and read

read some pious Books; but is this time to be compar'd with that which is spent in things they may very well be without? or, not to mention the time, will they say that they are more desirous to be instructed in their Duties, and to practise them, than to grow rich, or satisfy some other Passion? Do they, for example, understand the *Morals* of Christ, as well as the cunning Part of Traffick, and speak of the former with as great a Pleasure as those who follow Trade speak of the latter? Yet it should be otherwise, seeing Men shall not be sav'd, because they were industrious Merchants, but because they knew and practis'd Christianity well. The same may be said of some other Professions, wherein Christians spend all their Lives. Could many of them say sincerely, that they had rather have their Minds full of Knowledg, and their Hearts inclin'd to obey the Gospel, and be poor, despis'd, hated and miserable, than to be rich, esteem'd, and have but a small Knowledg of the Christian Doctrine, and observe it as 'tis commonly done?

Notwithstanding this lamentable Disposition, they profess to live like honest Men, they put on the outside, and as it were the Garments of Religion; but they unluckily stop there, and the Conduct of their Life contradicts, as I have shew'd, their Profession. They commonly behave them-

themſelves as if the Chriſtian Religion was wholly ſhut up within the Walls of Churches, and conſiſted only in ſome outward Practices; whereas the Apoſtles teach us, that what Religion, next to the Worſhip of God, requires from us, chiefly conſiſts in our manner of living and converſing with other Men.

If we examine ſomewhat carefully the publick Behaviour of moſt Chriſtians, we may take notice that they obſerve no Rule of Juſtice among themſelves, but inaſmuch as it agrees with their private Intereſt. If they are the better for breaking the Rules of Juſtice, that is, if the doing of it will prove advantageous to them, and they neither endanger their Reputation, nor expoſe themſelves to the Severity of the Laws for ſo doing, they never fail to break them. They will be guilty of any Fraud and Cheat, provided they be not ſued for it, and their Reputation be not ſo blemiſh'd as to do them ſome Prejudice in the World. They commonly call *an honeſt Man*, a Man who can't be puniſh'd by the Laws, and lives not worſe than others, according to the Cuſtoms of the Place he is in. A *good Man*, according to the Notions of the Vulgar, is a Man who keeps a better Outſide, with reſpect to what we call Piety, that is, with reſpect to publick Exerciſes, the frequenting whereof is a very equivocal Sign of a good inward

inward Disposition. We see every minute some Men careful of that sort of Duties, and who seem to be pious Men by their Discourses; but nevertheless they are as greedy and unjust as those who profess no Vertue. If we examine throughly those *good* and *honest Men*, we shall see very often that we are only beholden to the Laws and Custom for their outward and seeming Vertue, and not at all to the Gospel, which they know but very imperfectly, and observe but as far as it serves their ends.

If Justice is so generally violated, what shall we say of *Charity*, which goes much farther? Do we see many People who concern themselves in the Reputation of their Neighbours, as in their own? Are they slow and reserv'd in judging of them? Do they not presently pass an ill Sentence upon them, without minding the wrong it may do them? On the contrary, have they not much ado to have a good Opinion of them? Their Judgment of the Sentiments of those who are not of the same Christian Society, is most unjust. They damn them without any more ado, without having any regard to their Manners, or understanding their Opinions: And then they do them all the harm they can in this Life. Nay, such a Conduct, so contrary to Charity, is accounted *Zeal* and *Devotion*; and Christians fancy (who would

would believe it, were it not to be ſeen every day?) that they ſhall inherit Heaven, by cruelly tearing and perſecuting their Neighbours. Meekneſs and Charity, ſo often mention'd in the New Teſtament, are look'd upon by thoſe falſe Zealots as Indifferency to any Religion; and, if they are to be believ'd, Fury and Cruelty are the only Characters of a good Chriſtian. Thoſe who ſhould teach others to be modeſt in their Judgment of their Neighbours, and the Doctrines they underſtand not, (which are Duties Humanity ſhould teach us) ſpend their Life in exaſperating ignorant People, by their publick and private Diſcourſes, againſt other Chriſtians; and are as good Patterns of judging raſhly, and perſecuting without any Pity, as they are ill Examples of living like Chriſtians.

As for the other temporal Intereſts of our Neighbours, how few are they, I will not ſay, who look upon them as their own, (as they ſhould, according to the Goſpel) but who endeavour to procure them, as they might without prejudicing themſelves? It ſeems, that provided we live well, and have nothing to fear for our ſelves, 'tis no matter whether others groan, for example, under exceſſive Labour, to earn what is abſolutely neceſſary to them, and live in the fear of begging by the firſt Misfortune that befals them.

Others

Others may be without any thing, but we must want nothing; there is no Reward too little for them, and no Profit too great for us; 'tis enough if they don't starve; but as for us no Riches can be too vast. In many Places a Man is accounted even a *Person of exemplary Vertue*, when he endeavours not to hurt his Neighbour, tho he does him no good, being nevertheless able to help him, without prejudicing himself. Charity, among that sort of Men is, if I may say so, but a *negative* Vertue, which consists in doing no harm, not in doing good, and eagerly promoting our Neighbours Interests, as the Gospel commands. 'Tis extremely difficult for these Men to part with their Indolence in the behalf of those who stand in need of them, when 'tis not their Interest; but the least thing is sufficient to engage them to act against their Neighbours, or at least to do nothing for them.

If we consider the other part of Charity which concerns the Poor, who want our Alms; how many are they, I will not say, who deprive themselves of what is necessary to them, or give away their *Overplus*, but who keep any proportion between their vain or foolish Expences and their Alms.

If among Christians we look for the Vertues we owe, if I may say so, to our selves, such as Modesty or Humility, Abstinence

ſtinence from unlawful Pleaſures, Patience in Adverſities; I doubt whether we ſhall find more of them than among ſome of the antient or modern Heathens, provided we be willing to do Juſtice to both; however 'tis certain at leaſt, that they are very ſcarce, eſpecially in an eminent degree. Nay, it often falls out, that thoſe who pretend to thoſe Vertues more than others, are mere Hypocrites, as one may eaſily obſerve, if their whole Behaviour be carefully examin'd. Humility or Modeſty hinder them not from hunting after Preferments, which they are not fit for; from making extraordinary Expences, when they have got them; nor from treating Men contemptuouſly, whoſe Vertues and Talents ſhine infinitely above theirs. Abſtinence from Pleaſures hinders them not from enjoying at leaſt all the Conveniences, and when they can, all the Delights of this Life, whilſt they preach Frugality to others. They will do, or are ready to do any thing, rather than loſe the Favour of thoſe, who gave them, or keep them in the Employments they enjoy. The higheſt degree of their Vertue conſiſts in doing nothing but what will pleaſe the Multitude; and if they are afraid to be cenſur'd, for having perform'd one of their Chriſtian Duties, or to draw Hatred on themſelves by practiſing it, we muſt not expect to ſee them

prefer Obedience to God's Commandments, to the Reputation they endeavour to get, or keep among Men. The reſt of Chriſtians do the like, not to make their Rulers aſham'd.

Sixthly, The Unbelievers who compare the Chriſtian Morals with the Manners of the Chriſtians, ſay they can't believe that thoſe Morals are reveal'd by God, ſeeing the Effects of them are ſo inconſiderable. They ſay they can't apprehend that a Religion reveal'd, as we affirm, for the Good and Happineſs of Mankind, and ſo excellent above all others, made not a greater Alteration in the World in what concerns good Manners. But if they had reflected enough upon the Nature of the Chriſtian Religion, and the State of *Europe* and *Aſia*, before it was eſtabliſh'd, they would ſpare that Objection.

They ſhould remember that the Chriſtian Religion contains ſome Laws, as I have already ſaid, which tho admirable in themſelves, force no body to obſerve them, that there may be room for Rewards and Puniſhments. So that we muſt not wonder if they are violated, as all others are, eſpecially if it be conſider'd that thoſe Rewards and Puniſhments concern another Life. Men, tho perſwaded of the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion, look upon them as remote, and are ſo affected with outward Objects, which work

work upon their Senſes or Imagination, that the preſent Time prevails over the future. Beſides, it ought to be obſerv'd that there are different degrees of *Perſwaſion*, tho Perſwaſion it ſelf be moſt true. No body doubts of ſome conſiderable Facts of antient Hiſtory; for example, that *Ceſar* overcame *Pompey*; however there is ſome Difference between the degree of this Perſwaſion, and the degree of that whereby every body is perſwaded of what he ſees. Tho thoſe who have read the Roman Authors that were contemporary, and thoſe who ſpoke of it in the next Century, doubt not at all of *Ceſar*'s Victory; yet it muſt be confeſs'd, that the Perſwaſion ariſing from what we have ſeen, is ſtronger and more lively. The Chriſtians who believe the Divinity of the Laws of the Goſpel, and are ſometimes mov'd with it, are, by the ſame Reaſon I juſt now alledg'd, more mov'd with the preſent Pleaſure of giving up themſelves to ſome Paſſion; and ſo this laſt Motion overcomes the other. Jeſus Chriſt foreſaw that Diſorder, and ſaid that few Men would obſerve his Commandments, and many break them, * as I have already obſerv'd elſewhere. * Part II. Chap. 2.

But it will be ſaid, Why does not God make the Rewards and Puniſhments of the Goſpel as ſenſible to Men as what they ſee? Why do they not ſee, if I may ſay ſo, Paradiſe

radiſe and Hell open'd; good Men in the one, and wicked Men in the other? I anſwer, that if it were ſo, thoſe who obey God, not only becauſe of the Rewards and Puniſhments, but out of Thankfulneſs, and becauſe they are convinc'd that his Laws are juſt and reaſonable, could not be diſtinguiſh'd from thoſe who obey only out of Fear, and wiſh that God had been pleas'd to let them ſatisfy their Paſſions. For 'tis certain that if Rewards and Puniſhments were made ſenſible, every body would pay to God the ſame outward Obedience.

Beſides, tho it is moſt certain that the Chriſtian Religion is not obſerv'd as it ſhould be, and that the Difference between the Manners of Chriſtians and Heathens is not ſo great as it ought to be; yet it muſt be confeſs'd that Chriſtianity hath ſeveral great Advantages above Paganiſm. Firſt, there is a great Difference between a Commonwealth that hath good Laws, which teach exactly to diſtinguiſh Good from Evil; and a Commonwealth, the Laws whereof approve or ſuffer ſome Crimes which are very prejudicial to Society. In the former, good Laws keep at leaſt part of the Citizens to their Duty, and hinder others from running themſelves into great Exceſſes; but in the other the Law-giver lets looſe all manner of Vices, and puts no Bounds to them: from

from whence it comes to paſs that an infinite Number of Men give up themſelves to them. The ſame may be ſaid, in ſeveral reſpects, of Chriſtianity and Paganiſm; but I ſhall only alledg two Examples. Indeed the Notions of Juſtice and Charity, which the Goſpel hath brought into the World, have not been ſo effectual as they ſhould have been; but however thoſe Notions are the Reaſon why a horrible Cuſtom practis'd among the Romans hath been condemn'd. They took great Pleaſure in ſeeing Men kill one another, or fight with wild Beaſts. So cruel a Diverſion laſted during many Ages at *Rome*; nor was the Humanity of the Roman People, ſo much boaſted of by their Hiſtorians, offended at it in the leaſt. The ſame People as well as the Grecians were ſo horribly addicted to Fornication and Sodomy, that they never imagin'd there was any harm it it, provided it might not prejudice their temporal Intereſts. Thoſe who will read their comical and ſatyrical Poets, will not only ſee the Matter of Fact, but alſo the ſad Conſequences of thoſe Debaucheries. Among Chriſtians one of them has been always deteſted, and not ſo common; and the other has not been ſo great as amongſt the Heathens, becauſe they are both condemn'd in the Goſpel. The Heathens gave up themſelves to a thouſand infamous Debau-

cheries, not only without being punish'd for it, but also without feeling any Remorses of Conscience, because they knew not that they were unlawful. Hence it is that they never gave over their Lewdness, but when the Body being worn out, could no longer answer the Disorder of the Mind; and that they never shew'd any Sorrow for it, whereby Youth might be deterr'd from it. All that old Men could say to young Men was, to enjoy the Pleasures of the Flesh only as much as they were consistent with the Welfare of their Families. But under the Gospel the Knowledg Men have of doing Evil, when they give up themselves to Lewdness, is as it were a Bridle, which stops a great many in the midst of their Pleasures; and a Leaven which often works Repentance, and excites Men to deter others from doing the like.

I will not say that Justice is much better administr'd among Christians than elsewhere, but it can't be deny'd that their Civil and Political Laws are better. What may be the Reason of it? 'Tis because the Laws of the Gospel have settl'd the Notions of Good and Evil, which were uncertain among other Nations, or rather have introduc'd them anew: from whence it is that those who do Evil dare not assert it; and that many Crimes are not daily committed, which otherwise would be com-

committed openly. To live ſomewhat modeſtly among the Greeks and the Romans, one needed to have been well bred up, or to have learn'd Philoſophy; nor did this hinder them from doing ſeveral unjuſt things, which Exceſs only could make infamous. But among Chriſtians Men learn whether they will or not, the Laws that condemn them; and no body will be ſo bold as to ſay, that the leaſt Unjuſtice is allow'd them. Princes abuſe not their Authority, as they did in Paganiſm, for the ſame Reaſon; and Subjects enjoy more quietly and ſafely the Fruits of their Labours, eſpecially in the Places where the Knowledg of the Chriſtian Religion is greater than in others.

CHAP. VI.

That Unbelievers can't conclude that the Chriſtian Religion is falſe, becauſe the Divines, whom they know, anſwer not their Objections well, or maintain ſome falſe Doctrines, as true ones, and as being the Doctrine of Chriſt.

IF I ſay in general that one of the chief things that lead Men into Incredulity who have Wit and Judgment enough, is the weak Anſwers which are often re-

turn'd to their Objections, and the absurd Doctrines which are maintain'd against them as true ones: No Christian Society will contradict me, because they accuse one another of very great Errors. Thus, without naming any in particular, I leave to every one the liberty of making such Applications as he thinks fit.

Forasmuch as there are many things difficult to apprehend in Systems of Divinity, which raise great Difficulties in the Minds of those who read, or hear talk of them; 'tis no wonder if Men of Sagacity and Penetration propose some Doubts to Divines. Nay, according to the Supposition of every Christian Society, *viz.* that all others err in something, it cannot be wondr'd at, if it be said that Unbelievers offer some Objections to Divines, which they can't resolve according to their *Hypothesis*, or which they resolve by contradicting themselves. Divines upbraid one another with it. Let us therefore suppose that a Man, not altogether ignorant, observes in the Society in which he was born, that the manner after which some Doctrines of the Christian Religion are explain'd, is subject to great Difficulties, or is altogether false. Let us suppose further, that the Divines of his Country are very learn'd Men, and understand the Christian Religion better than others; an Opinion common enough, especially among those

thoſe who never went out of their Country, or never read the Books of other Sects. When they perceive that the Divines whom they conſult ſatisfy them not, or maintain palpable Falſities, they conclude from thence that the Religion of their Country is not true, and conſequently that the Chriſtian Religion is altogether falſe. If it happens that a Man having ſuch Thoughts, never reads the Works of other Chriſtians, who are free from the Errors he is offended at; the more he lives, the more he confirms himſelf in his Opinion; becauſe as ſoon as an Error hath been found out, the longer it is thought of, the better it is known. When Men know nothing better about the Subject in queſtion, and have not Penetration and Learning enough to find out Truth of themſelves, they can hardly forbear doubting of every thing, becauſe they preſently ſuſpect that the other Parts of Divinity which they have not examin'd, are not better; and obſerve that the ſame Doctrine, whereof they have found out the Falſity, is accounted as eſſential as others. But let us ſuppoſe again, that a Man, taken up with other Buſineſs, and who has no time to ſpare for ſuch an Examination, (as there are a great many) comes to read Books of Controverſy written by ingenious Men of both ſides, he will often perceive that both Parties attack

tack very well, and defend themſelves ill. That Man will conclude from thence, and often with Reaſon, that both Parties are in the wrong; the more he hears them one after another, the more he'll be convinc'd of it, and at laſt he'll believe that there is nothing true, becauſe he hath not Parts enough to diſtinguiſh Truth from Falſhood. If we add that there are ſome other external and internal Motives, which make him incline to Unbelief, as there are but too many, that Man will get into a Scepticiſm almoſt incurable, or into a formal Unbelief, out of which he will hardly be able to extricate himſelf.

What I have propos'd as Suppoſitions, is really to be found in a great part of *Chriſtendom*; and there are a great many People in *Italy*, *France*, *Spain* and *Germany*, (for I muſt tell it, and I ought not to conceal that I don't follow the particular Opinions which prevail in thoſe Places) there is, I ſay, an infinite Number of Men in the ſame caſe, as I have deſcrib'd. They ſee ſome Opinions manifeſtly falſe, eſtabliſh'd in thoſe vaſt Countries by a publick Authority: if they offer any Objections, they are pitifully reſolv'd; and then if they dare reply any thing, they are overwhelm'd with Cenſures and Threatnings, not to ſay that they are ſent to the Inquiſition, and burnt if they grow obſtinate. Nevertheleſs Divines maintain

thoſe

thoſe Doctrines, tho evidently falſe, with great Heat; they make uſe of all their Wit and Eloquence to prove them. Many Lay-men who want not Penetration, but know no better, think that indeed this is the Chriſtian Religion; and becauſe they diſtinctly apprehend the Falſity of what is ſaid, they conclude from thence that Religion is not true.

Others add to their Meditations the reading of ſome controverſial Book of Roman Catholick and Proteſtant Authors; and they ſee that the latter altogether deſtroy the Doctrines of the Church of *Rome*. They rightly conclude from thence, that they are falſe, and the utmoſt Endeavours of their Teachers can't free them from that Opinion. On the other hand, they often find ſome Books of Roman Catholick Authors, who attack well enough ſome particular Opinions of certain Proteſtants; and thoſe Proteſtants are as unlucky in defending their own Opinions, as they are ſucceſsful in aſſaulting thoſe of the Roman Catholicks. They alſo think that thoſe Proteſtants are in the wrong, and becauſe their Examination reaches not to all the Sects ſeparated from the Church of *Rome*, they confound them one with another, and condemn them alike; ſo that at laſt they perſwade themſelves that Truth is to be found no where. Beſides other Motives which may confirm them in thoſe

those Thoughts, and which I have already mention'd; they see two things which affect them so much, that they retain their Opinions for ever, if no better Books come into their Hands, or if no body frees them from the Doubts they are in.

The first is, that it clearly appears that 'tis the temporal Interest of Divines to maintain those Doctrines. Those who assert them with Heat, and declame with the greatest Violence against other Christian Societies, are preferr'd, and get the most considerable Dignities of the Party they are in. On the contrary, if any one seems to be modest, and thinks himself oblig'd in Conscience to be moderate towards those who are call'd *Hereticks* or *Heterodox*; he must needs be very much favour'd, if he be not excluded for ever from all sorts of Employment, and ruins not himself. In some Places that's enough to be altogether undone; and almost every where if any intimates that he approves not all the Opinions of the Party he is in, (tho he does it never so modestly) they shew him no Pity, he must suffer whatever Hatred and Cruelty can do, when they are cloth'd with the Pretence of Religion.

The second thing that confirms Unbelievers in their Disposition, is, that Divines will be Judges and Parties in controverted Doctrines, against the clearest Principles

ciples of Equity, tho 'tis moſt evident that 'tis their Intereſt to favour one of the Parties. Tho their Deciſions be never ſo unreaſonable and unſatisfactory, they muſt be ſubmitted to, becauſe they look upon them as good and ſolid. Nay, if they are to be believ'd, the Books of their Adverſaries ought not to be read; or thoſe who read them ought to do it with a Deſign of not approving their Arguments, otherwiſe they muſt undergo the Condemnation of their Parties.

Unbelievers, who are convinc'd of the Falſity of ſeveral particular Doctrines, and obſerve that they are maintain'd out of a worldly Intereſt, and by unjuſt and violent Means, conclude that Divines, and conſequently all Chriſtians, are factious People, and Enemies to Truth, as well as thoſe who profeſs the other Religions which are ſeen in the World.

It can't be doubted but theſe are moſt violent Prejudices againſt ſome Chriſtian Societies; but 'tis an eaſy thing to ſhew, that they ought not to involve all Chriſtianity in general. Firſt, Unbelievers can't ſuppoſe without Examination, as they do on this occaſion, that the Notion Men have of the Chriſtian Religion in their Country, or that of ſome Divines whom they have read, is really the ſame with that of its Founders. Some Alterations may have by degrees crept into the Doctrine

ctrine of the Chriſtians whom they know, and ſo it may be very different from that of Chriſt and his Apoſtles. No body can be ſure of the contrary, without going to the Source, to compare it with the Streams which are ſaid to flow from it; that is, without reading the Writings of the Apoſtles, and comparing their Doctrine with that which is now pretended to be the true Doctrine of the Founders of Chriſtianity. This Unbelievers are neceſſarily oblig'd to do before they affirm that the Doctrine of Jeſus Chriſt is falſe. Elſe they would imitate corrupt Judges, who vouchſafe not to examine the Inſtruments of a Suit in Law, but give their Sentence at the firſt Report of it. I am perſwaded that if the Unbelievers of the above-mention'd Places would undertake that Examination, they would preſently ſee that moſt of the Doctrines which they diſlike are not to be found in the Writings of the Apoſtles, and conſequently that whatever Chriſtians think now, ought not to be aſcrib'd to them.

The ſame thing ought to be obſerv'd every where, and Men ought not to judg of the Goſpel according to the Opinions that are commonly receiv'd where they live; or, which is worſe, to condemn it from hearing a ſilly Preacher, who repreſents it quite otherwiſe than it is. Yet there are many People who entertain no favou-

favourable Thoughts of the Christian Religion, by reason of the Explications thereof, which they hear from the Pulpits, which are but too often ill provided. A great many things spoken there, are so far from bearing a severe Examination of judicious Men, that they could scarce be allow'd in the Conversation of any Persons not altogether destitute of common Sense. That sort of Discourses can't, without great Injustice, be confounded with the *Word of God*; tho there are some who affect to give them that Name, as if such Preachers were inspir'd Apostles, and authoriz'd with Miracles. They should have a greater respect for the Gospel than to call such Meditations by the same Name with the Discourses of Christ and his Apostles. I had not made this Remark, were it not that such Expressions give occasion to Unbelievers to despise Christianity, which deserves as much to be admir'd by the most penetrating and solid Wits, as many Sermons deserve to be despis'd by the meanest and most illiterate Persons.

As no body could bear the Injustice of that Man, who should judg of the Opinions of an Author by the Discourses of another, who perhaps understands them not, and whose Interest it is to explain them otherwise, and then pretends he may with Reason vent his Explications as infallible: so Unbelievers can't ascribe to the Apostles

ſtles the Opinions which they hear preach'd, as Apoſtolical Doctrines, before they have carefully compar'd them with the Writings of the Apoſtles, unleſs they are willing to be look'd upon as the moſt unjuſt of Men.

Secondly, Unbelievers are guilty of another Fault, which is not much leſs than the foregoing, when by reaſon of the falſe Doctrines which they have read in the Writings of ſome Divines, or heard them preach, they reject all Chriſtianity. For it muſt be granted, that 'tis not impoſſible but many Truths may be mix'd with Lies: and as it can't be ſaid that a Book contains nothing but Truth, becauſe ſome few Truths are to be found in it; ſo it can't be affirm'd that every thing in it is falſe, becauſe ſome Lies have been found in it. Is there, for example, any profane Hiſtory, either antient or modern, without a mixture of Truth and Falſhood? Yet no body ſays that Hiſtory contains nothing that's true and certain. They endeavour only to diſtinguiſh what is true from what is falſe. The like ought to be practis'd with reſpect to the Explications of Chriſtian Doctrines which we read or hear. We ought neither wholly to reject them nor embrace them, becauſe there may be a Mixture of Truth and Falſhood. We ought, as I ſaid before, to compare them with the Writings

of

of the Founders of Christianity, and judg by those Writings of Religion it self, and of what is true in the Opinions of modern Divines; this is, if I may say so, the Touch-stone by which only the true Doctrine of the Apostles can be known.

Thirdly, Unbelievers undoubtedly know, that a Truth changes not its Nature for being ill defended. We see every day very good Causes ill pleaded by some Lawyers, who understand not their Profession. Nay 'tis confess'd among all Christians, that there are a great many Books whose Authors are really engag'd in the Defence of Truth, but they do it so ill, that it would certainly be condemn'd if it had no better Support. Many People, for example, who have not studied well the Writings of the Apostles, say they see no Character of Divinity in the Doctrine of the Gospel, and can't convince an Unbeliever of it; but nevertheless they believe it to be Divine with as great a Certainty as if they perceiv'd the *Finger of God* in every part of it, because they are, say they, inwardly perswaded of it by the Holy Ghost, without knowing why. That's the Cant of a perfect Phanatick, who equals, without being aware of it, the Gospel with the Alcoran, and all the false Religions, the Followers whereof may all say, as he does, that they are perswaded of it by a secret

and inward Operation of God upon their Hearts. But the Apoſtles never ſaid any ſuch thing; all their Preaching conſiſts in ſome Facts, and in good Reaſonings, attended with the miraculous Gifts they had; and 'tis by ſuch Means they pretended to prove the Divinity of their Doctrine. So that we ſhould wrong them very much ſhould we believe that they taught their Doctrine could not be embrac'd by the means of Knowledg, but by a mere *Enthuſiaſm.*

Others, to do the Chriſtian Religion a greater Honour, aſcribe to the Apoſtles an Art which they themſelves ſeriouſly * ſay they have not. They ſet forth their Stile as an admirable Pattern of Eloquence, which exceeds that of the Grecians and Romans. What follows from thence? Unbelievers read the Writings of thoſe Holy Men, to ſeek what they are told is contain'd in them; and becauſe they don't find it, they fancy that thoſe who ſaid ſo, deſign'd to deceive them; and thereupon being exaſperated againſt them who grounded in part the Truth of the Doctrine of the Apoſtles upon their wonderful Stile, they wholly reject it. They could not be blam'd for that, if the Apoſtles themſelves boaſted of their Eloquence; but ſeeing they ſay quite the contrary, 'tis a great piece of Injuſtice to condemn them as Impoſtors, upon the Aſſer-

* 1 Cor. 1. 17. & 11. 4, 13, &c.

Assertion of those who ascribe to them what they never had, nor pretended to have.

The true Character of the Apostles Stile, to say so by the by, is this. First, 'tis simple and plain, such as is the Stile of those who propose some things, of which they are fully perswaded. Secondly, 'tis a Stile without any Ornaments of Rhetorick, whether it be with respect to the Choice of the Words, or the Disposition. If a thousand sublime Strokes are to be found in it, they come from the things they say, which are very sublime, not from the Words or Order. Thirdly, we must add to it that Providence undoubtedly watch'd over their manner of writing, that they should always say Truth; and lest, if they had express'd themselves ill, they should be misunderstood by their Readers. But this is not a fit Place to treat of that Subject. I only made those Remarks to hinder Unbelievers from taking Advantage at the ill Rhetorick of some Defenders of Christianity, who contradict the Apostles without being aware of it.

'Tis manifest in general, that the Defects of those who defend Truth, ought not to prejudice it; and I declare as to my self, that I don't desire at all to be believ'd in any thing, but when it has been examin'd and compar'd with the Wri-

tings of the Apoſtles; or that any of my Thoughts ſhould be aſcrib'd to them, but when they have been found in their Works. If I have been miſtaken in any thing, I deſire thoſe Miſtakes may be aſcrib'd to me, and not at all to the Religion I vindicate.

There is no need I ſhould ſay here, that the Apoſtles had no temporal Intereſt to move them to preach ſuch a Doctrine. I have already ſaid ſo elſewhere, and I will prove it more at large in my firſt Letter at the end of this Diſcourſe. I will not repeat neither that they pretended not their Doctrine ſhould be receiv'd with any Examination, becauſe I have prov'd it in the firſt Chapter of this ſecond Part. So that if Self-Intereſt and Ambition are often the Reaſon why Divines maintain now ſome Opinions, and after a manner unbecoming Chriſtianity; 'tis their Fault, not the Apoſtles, who can be charg'd with no ſuch thing.

After thoſe general Obſervations I muſt ſet down ſome particular Examples of falſe Doctrines, which hinder Unbelievers from believing the Goſpel. 'Tis but too true that one might write large Volumes about that Matter, but I ſhall be contented to alledg three or four Examples of Doctrines which offend Unbelievers, and are contrary to the Doctrine of the Apoſtles.

There

There are ſome People now who pretend that we ought ſcarce to make uſe of Reaſon in Matters of Religion. They maintain that we ought to believe its Divinity, without knowing why; that when the Queſtion is about the Senſe of the Revelation, or the Books which contain it, we ought not to reaſon, neither to diſcover it; and that we ought to believe even the things that are moſt contrary to Reaſon, rather than forſake the literal Senſe. They are ſo full of this Thought, *viz.* that Reaſon may overthrow all Divinity, if thoſe who apply themſelves to it are allow'd to make uſe of it; and if they ſee any body who reaſons better than ordinary Divines do, or has any Principles ſomewhat different from theirs, which he has embrac'd by uſing his Reaſon, they ſlander him as a dangerous Man, becauſe he ventures to reaſon about the receiv'd Doctrines. Such a Character is always attended with Hatred, and ſtirs ill-affected Perſons againſt thoſe who receiv'd it from Heaven; as if it were impoſſible for a Divine to live quietly with a Man who endeavours to reaſon well, and grounds the Chriſtian Religion upon undeniable Principles. Others will have us humbly to ſubmit to the Deciſions of thoſe whoſe Profeſſion it is publickly to explain Religion, without miſtruſting them, or reaſoning at all, becauſe we ought to look upon

on them as infallible; tho we have no Proof of it. They think 'tis impoſſible for moſt Chriſtians to examine thoſe Doctrines; and their beſt way is, as they ſay, blindly to follow their Guides.

Such Diſcourſes which are commonly to be heard from the Pulpits, and elſewhere, have made long ago a great many Unbelievers. For the firſt thing that comes then into ones Mind, is, that thoſe who ſpeak at this rate are not very ſure of what they ſay, and deſign to deceive others, becauſe there is nothing, tho never ſo falſe and abſurd, but what may be maintain'd by the ſame Principle. If we were told the ſame thing in our ordinary Affairs, we would really think that thoſe who ſay ſo deſign to deceive us. If they would ſell ſomething to us, and we were told that we muſt not examine it, we would preſently ſuſpect that they deſign'd to cheat us. In Matters of Religion, as well as in other things, we have no other Guide but Reaſon to diſtinguiſh a falſe Religion from a true one. Beſides, 'tis only by the uſe of Reaſon we can find out the Senſe of the Words contain'd in thoſe Books wherein we know the Revelation is. Nevertheleſs thoſe Men would have us to read thoſe Books with an unlimited Credulity, and be ready to receive whatever we are told, tho it be never ſo contrary to all our Notions. They are afraid, as

ſoon

ſoon as they hear of a Man who is only for Reaſon, and whom inſignificant Words and an ill-grounded Authority can't ſatisfy. Unbelievers conclude from thence that there is a Deſign upon them, and that Divines very well perceive that the Doctrines which they would introduce can't be maintain'd, ſeeing they will not allow that they ſhould be examin'd. And becauſe that ſtrange Doctrine is cri'd up as one of the chief Doctrines of Chriſtianity, thoſe who have not carefully read the Writings of the Apoſtles, fancy that they have taught it, and involve them in the ſame Suſpicions with ſome modern Divines.

When Divines have taught Principles ſo contrary to the Nature of Men, they preach *Tranſubſtantiation* and other ſuch Doctrines to credulous Men, which they inſinuate by virtue of that Maxim of not reaſoning in Matters of Religion. But Unbelievers fail not to perceive the Falſity of thoſe Doctrines, and perſiſt the more in their Thoughts concerning the Falſity of the Chriſtian Religion.

But they ſhould obſerve that the Apoſtles teach us no where that we ought not to uſe our Reaſon to examine whether Religion is true or not, or to know the Senſe of their Words. On the contrary, they ſuppoſe every where that we ought to examine what they ſay, and not believe it be-

fore we are sure that they say nothing but Truth. They also suppose that we are rational Creatures, and able to put a good Sense upon their Words, by observing all the Rules that are made use of to understand the Language of other Men. They no where say that they teach us some things that seem to be or are contrary to Reason, and that we must part with our Notions to embrace them. They knew very well that they were to deal with Men who judg of nothing but by acquiescing in their own Reasonings.

'Tis true we comprehend not perfectly all the things mention'd in the Writings of the Apostles, such as are, for example, the Divine Properties; but we form at least some Notions of them which are not at all contrary to Reason; there is no need we should have an exact and adequate Notion of them to be sav'd. Reason also teaches us that we can't know exactly this sort of things, nor many others, and that we must not judg of things we understand not. 'Tis also a critical and grammatical Rule, to decide nothing about an equivocal or obscure Expression. So that we ought not to sacrifice our Reason and our grammatical Rules to *Faith*, as if it was contrary to them, in order to believe what the Apostles say; but we must remember that we have not exact Notions of every thing, and ought to judg only of such

ſuch things as are known to us. We ought not neither to part with the Rules of Criticks, which are grounded upon good Senſe and the conſtant uſe of Languages, to underſtand what the Apoſtles ſay. On the contrary, we ought to make uſe of Reaſon and Critical Rules in their whole Extent; and we ſhall ſee that there is nothing in the Doctrine of the Apoſtles that claſhes in the leaſt with the Light of Reaſon, or that cannot be explain'd, as much as 'tis neceſſary, by good Critical Rules.

Thoſe who reject any of them, do it becauſe they have introduc'd new Doctrines into the Chriſtian Religion, which they falſly aſcribe to the Apoſtles; and both becauſe ſuch Doctrines can't bear the Teſt of Reaſon, and becauſe they can't reaſon well themſelves, or make a good uſe of Critical Rules: for example, what is call'd the *Real Preſence* of the Body of Chriſt in the Euchariſt, or *Tranſubſtantiation*, which can't be believ'd without forſaking Reaſon, nor be found in the Writings of the Apoſtles, by uſing good Grammatical Rules; the real Preſence, I ſay, or *Tranſubſtantiation*, are Doctrines which the Apoſtles never thought of. Divines declame againſt Reaſon and Criticks in the behalf of thoſe new Doctrines, not at all in the behalf of the Doctrine of the Apoſtles.

For

For my part, having ſtudi'd thoſe Matters as much as I can, I think I may affirm that no Propoſition can be extracted out of the Goſpels, or any other Writings of the Apoſtles, which being expreſs'd in their Words, is not perfectly agreeable to Reaſon, if it be interpreted by the ſame Grammatical Rules, as all other Authors are. Moreover, I affirm that one need ſuppoſe nothing but what is moſt reaſonable, to know that the Chriſtian Religion is of Divine Revelation.

Some Divines who have not ſtudi'd the Holy Scripture well, maintain another thing, which is not leſs proper to hinder Infidels from believing in Jeſus Chriſt, than the Maxims I have confuted. They ſay that many Commands of the Goſpel are Arbitrary Precepts, whereof no other good Reaſon can be given but the mere Will of God; or, that he gave them to Men to humble them. They believe that God would have ſome Myſteries in Religion, ſuch as the *Real Preſence*, or *Tranſubſtantiation*, to mortify Man's Pride, who underſtands nothing of them. They ſay that to deny ones Paſſions, as the Goſpel commands, is a Commandment grounded upon no other Reaſon but the Will of God.

It can't be doubted but that when we are ſure a thing is of Divine Revelation, we muſt believe it, or practiſe it, tho we ſhould

ſhould not apprehend the Reaſons of it; and this many Divines ſay concerning ſeveral Ceremonial Precepts of the Law of *Moſes*. Some learned * Men undertook to ſhew the contrary with reſpect to thoſe Ceremonies, and it may be ſaid in general, that they have not been unſucceſsful in it. But as for the Commandments of the Goſpel, one may boldly aſſert that there is none, of which 'tis a hard thing to give a good Reaſon, ſuppoſing humane Nature in the State it is in.

* Marſham, Spencer, &c.

Nothing can be more falſe and contrary to the Nature of the Goſpel than to fancy that God deſign'd in part to ſhew only that he is Maſter, by enjoining ſome Commandments which have no relation with the Good of Mankind. Religion was only reveal'd for us, not for God, who, abſolutely ſpeaking, neither wants what we think of him, nor the Worſhip we pay him. He manifeſted himſelf to us, only to make us happy; and gave us ſome Laws fit to make us enjoy a Happineſs as great as can be here, if all Mankind would obſerve them; and at the ſame time fit to lead to an eternal Felicity thoſe who obey them, notwithſtanding the ill Examples of others.

For example, the Goſpel commands us to deny our Paſſions, or *our ſelves*, which is the ſame thing; not only to give to God that mark of our Submiſſion to his Or-

Orders, but for the Good of humane Society. To *deny ones ſelf*, or ones Paſſions, ſignifies only to prefer the Obſervation of the Commandments of the Goſpel to ones unruly Deſires. Now all thoſe Commandments tend to the Good of Men, and there is none but what is of that Nature. Let us ſuppoſe that a Man who has been injur'd by another deſires to revenge himſelf; if he reflects upon what the Goſpel commands him, he will find that 'tis one of thoſe Deſires he ought to deny. The Reaſon of it is, becauſe if he ſhould revenge himſelf, he on whom he ſhould do it would not fail to revenge himſelf too; and ſo there could be no end of it, which would altogether diſturb the Society. Wherefore God who form'd it, and protects it, forbids Revenge, and declares he will puniſh thoſe that ſhall break that Commandment. Let all other Deſires that are contrary to the Commands of the Goſpel be examin'd, and it will be found that they can't be ſatisfi'd without hurting humane Society.

However it will be ſaid, that when the Goſpel commands us to deny our Deſires rather than break any of its Commandments, or to ſuffer Death for it, if it be neceſſary; it has no regard to the Good of the Society, but the Will of God. But if we carefully conſider it, we ſhall find that Men can ſcarce do any thing more uſe-

uſeful to Mankind than that. It is undoubtedly uſeful to them to obſerve the Laws of Chriſt, which are ſo advantageous to them; and there is no Example more effectual to encourage them to that Obſervation than that of thoſe who had rather die than break any of thoſe Laws. If all Men were ſo diſpos'd, 'tis manifeſt they would contribute as much as they could to one another's Happineſs, and *would love their Neighbours as themſelves*; ſo that thoſe who ſacrifice their Life to bring others to the Obedience of the Goſpel by their Example, do a thing very uſeful to the Society. 'Tis therefore falſe that the Laws of the Goſpel are Arbitrary Laws, and no Commandments given to Men for their Good.

'Tis alſo falſe, that God would have Myſteries in Religion altogether incomprehenſible, only to humble Man. The Doctrine of the *Real Preſence* of Chriſt's Body in the Euchariſt is no Apoſtolical Doctrine; and the Apoſtles have taught none, of which we can have no Notion, not ſo much as a confus'd one, as it may be ſaid of that. To believe a thing, 'tis not neceſſary to have an exact and diſtinct *Idea* of it, but we muſt have at leaſt a general and confus'd Notion of it. For no body can believe what he underſtands not at all; ſeeing to believe that a Propoſition is true, is to acquieſce in the Relation

which

which is perceiv'd between the Terms it is made of, as Logicians teach, and none can acquieſce in a Relation that is not perceiv'd.

For example: when I am told, *the Dead ſhall riſe*, I underſtand not only the meaning of thoſe Words, *the Dead*, and *to riſe*, but alſo clearly perceive the Relation which is ſaid to be between thoſe two things, tho I don't know diſtinctly the Manner and Circumſtances of the Reſurrection. But if I was told, *the Dead ſhall riſe and not riſe at the ſame time*, without any Equivocation in the words *dead* and *to riſe*, perceiving no relation between an Affirmation and a Negation, I could not believe it. The ſame may be ſaid of all contradictory Propoſitions, they can't be an Object of Faith, which receives nothing but what it underſtands, at leaſt in ſome meaſure. Such is the Doctrine of the *Real Preſence*, which contains ſeveral ſuch Propoſitions.

When the Miracles of Chriſt and his Apoſtles are propos'd to Unbelievers, as undeniable Proofs of their Divine Miſſion, they fail not to queſtion the Truth of them. The chief Reaſon they alledg to make that Hiſtory ſuſpected, is the falſe Miracles which are now given out as true ones, to keep People in their Duty by this pious Fraud. Thoſe who make uſe of that Art, or endeavour to vindicate thoſe pretended

tended Miracles, can reply nothing to Unbelievers, without condemning themſelves, or betraying the Chriſtian Religion. They are far from confeſſing that they are in the wrong, they boldly maintain that there is no more reaſon to believe the Miracles of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, than to acknowledg the Truth of their modern Miracles. In the mean time the Unbelievers, who ſee that the latter are mere Impoſtures, fancy the former were ſo too. Thoſe who caſt in their way that Stumbling-block, are bound to remove it, and acknowledg the Truth, unleſs they will be look'd upon as Men of no Judgment, or leſs Conſcience.

But tho Unbelievers may triumph over that ſort of Men, who undertake to aſſert ſome Facts which cannot be maintain'd, they can't ſay againſt Chriſtians in general, that the Miracles on which their Faith is grounded, are like thoſe which are ſaid to be wrought every Day. Firſt, Chriſt and his Apoſtles affected not to work Miracles every minute, and out of Oſtentation; ſuch as are thoſe that are now talk'd of. Secondly, Chriſt and his Apoſtles, and thoſe in whoſe behalf thoſe Miracles were wrought, got no Money by publiſhing them abroad, as 'tis now practis'd by thoſe to whom thoſe Churches belong, wherein they are ſaid to be wrought. That very thing, *viz.* that the Opinion

of

of Miracles being wrought in a certain Place, brings Wealth to the Maſter of it, is enough to make one rightly ſuſpect whatever is ſaid about it. Thirdly, The Miracles on which the Goſpel is grounded, were done in the midſt of the Enemies of the Chriſtian Religion, among whom it was not ſafe to bear witneſs to thoſe Miracles; and on the contrary, thoſe who having examin'd them, ſhould have diſcover'd the Falſity of them, had nothing to fear. Such a Diſcovery had been very acceptable to the Jews and Heathens. But now Miracles are wrought among Men ready to believe any thing, or at leaſt to ſay they believe it, for fear of being deliver'd to the *Inquiſition*, where it is ſet up, or of drawing on themſelves the Hatred of the *Mob*, which ſometimes is not leſs to be fear'd than that dreadful Tribunal. To be ſure that the Teſtimony of another is well-grounded, he ought to have the liberty to ſay the contrary: But when he expoſes himſelf to Danger, if he ſays the contrary, his Teſtimony is of no weight. Beſides, to be ſure of the Truth of a Fact, one ought to have the liberty of examining it, but no body dares do that now, with reſpect to modern Miracles, in the Places wherein they are look'd upon as true. Thus there is a vaſt Difference between the Certainty of the Miracles wrought in the beginning of Chri-

Christianity, and what is said for those of our time. None but those who want either Judgment or Sincerity, will compare the one with the other.

But I must not forget here, that Unbelievers pretend to take advantage of what I have suppos'd, *viz.* that there are no Miracles now. They say, that if there is no Reason to make us believe that they are necessary now; there is none neither that can perswade us that there was any formerly, because the only Reason that could oblige God to work Miracles, many Centuries ago, was the Incredulity of Men which could not be cur'd any other way, and that the same Reason subsists still. So that if they are to be believ'd, God is not less oblig'd to work Miracles out of his Goodness, in the behalf of those who doubt now of the Truth of the Christian Religion, than he was in the time of the Apostles.

In answer to it I say, First, that the Proofs we have of the Truth of antient Miracles make them as it were sensible, if we reflect upon it; so that they may also be of use to cure our Doubts. It was necessary that God should work Miracles to establish the Christian Religion; but being establish'd, they are no longer necessary, because the History of Religion preserves the Proofs of those that were done, at its first Establishment. But it will be

ſaid, that the Truth of that Hiſtory is doubted of, and that therefore new Miracles are now requir'd.

I anſwer in the ſecond Place, That if the Proofs of the Truth of that Doctrine are good, as we affirm, and if they are doubted of only out of an ill Principle, they have no reaſon to complain of God's Goodneſs. If there remain'd no Proof of the Truth of the Hiſtory of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, it might be ſaid that God has forſaken us, and deals with us much worſe than with thoſe in whoſe behalf he wrought Miracles formerly. But having very good Reaſons to believe that Hiſtory to be true, they ought to be to us inſtead of Miracles. This being ſo, 'tis manifeſt that Men have not now the ſame Reaſon to wiſh for Miracles, as when the Chriſtian Religion was not yet eſtabliſh'd.

Thirdly, it ought to be obſerv'd, that to require new Miracles from God, with any ſhew of Reaſon, Men ſhould have made a right uſe of the Means they have to know the Truth, ſo that after a careful and impartial Examination they could not be ſatisfi'd about the thing they inquir'd after, but muſt doubt ſtill of it whether they would or not. Upon this Suppoſition it might be ſaid, that God would be in a manner oblig'd, by reaſon of his Goodneſs, to help Mens Incredulity. Hence it is that thoſe who made a good uſe of the Reve-

Revelation of the Old Teſtament, and might be apt to doubt of the Miſſion of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, not out of Obſtinacy, but becauſe the Proofs thereof were unknown to them, had the Advantage of ſeeing many Miracles in our Saviour's time. But let us ſuppoſe ſome Men of a quite contrary Diſpoſition, who perform not the Duties which the Light of Reaſon teaches us, who have no Love for the Truth, who are full of a thouſand ill-grounded Prejudices, and blinded with unruly Paſſions, who have examin'd nothing, but doubt of every thing out of a voluntary Perverſeneſs of their Mind and Inclinations. Can ſuch Men complain becauſe God works no Miracles in their behalf? Will they be ſo bold as to ſay that they are worthy of new Favours, for having deſpis'd thoſe which they had already receiv'd from him? If the Unbelievers of our time would but examine themſelves by this Picture, they might eaſily find out the Anſwer we can return to them.

Fourthly, I affirm that Miracles would be of no uſe to ſuch Men. The unbelieving Jews, in our Saviour's time, are a manifeſt Argument of what I ſay, ſeeing that being not able to deny his miraculous Works, they aſcrib'd them to the Devils. The Unbelievers of our time would never want ſhifts to bring into queſtion Mi-

racles wrought in their Preſence, ſeeing they have found out ſeveral to hinder us from drawing any Conſequence from thoſe of Chriſt, ſuppoſing they are true. But of this I ſhall ſpeak in my ſecond Leter at the end of this Diſcourſe.

Therefore it may be ſaid, that God has more reaſon to work no Miracles in the behalf of the Unbelievers of our time, than to work any. And ſuch was the Method of Chriſt. When he ſaw ſome obſtinate Men, who requir'd from him ſome Miracles, he wrought none, becauſe he ſaw they would not make a better uſe of them than of other Divine Graces, and would but thereby increaſe their Guilt.

* Mat. 13. 58. Mark 6. 5. The Evangeliſts obſerve *, that being come to *Nazareth*, *he did not many mighty Works there, becauſe of the Unbelief* of the Inhabitants of that Town. Some unbelieving Teachers having requir'd of him

† Mat. 12. 38. & 16. 1. a Miracle more than once, † he deni'd them, and referr'd them to that of his Reſurrection, whereof notwithſtanding they never had the Honour to be Eye-witneſſes. Wherefore he ſometimes ask'd thoſe who deſir'd that he would cure their

‖ Mat. 9. 29, &c. Diſeaſes, whether they believ'd ‖ he could do it, to teach them that none deſerves a new Grace but he that made a good uſe of others. It would have been an abſurd thing to expect or demand a Cure from him, had they not certainly known, by other

other Examples, or some good Reasons, that he was able to do it.

Those who suppose that the Goodness of God should incline him to deal otherwise with Unbelievers, suppose at once two things most absurd and altogether unworthy of Men who pretend to Reason. The first is, that God ought to have no respect to the Use Men have made of his Favours, but that the more they encrease their Unbelief, whatever the Reason of it may be, the more he is oblig'd to grant 'em new Graces; so changing the Course of Nature, as soon as they are pleas'd, doubt of Revelation; whereby the Conduct of God will depend upon the Will and Humour of Men. The second Absurdity that follows from thence is, that God would be oblig'd out of his Goodness to satisfy as many Parties as there are Unbelievers in the World, and every one according to his own Humour and Method. For every one of them would see some Miracles, and as it were put the Divine Providence to a Trial, without minding what it might have done at other times, or in other places. If any can brook those Consequences which necessarily follow from the Unbeliever's Objection; there is no need we should longer dispute with him. From what hath been said it appears that God is not oblig'd to work Miracles now, because he wrought some formerly.

In those Places where the modern Miracles are not believ'd, there is an ill Custom, as well as in those where they are believ'd, which is very prejudicial to the Christian Religion, with regard to the Incredulous; and it is this: Several People who maintain some Doctrines of no great Moment and Certainty, with too great a Heat, are wont to say, to magnify their Zeal, that if the Opinion of their Adversaries was true, the Christian Religion would be lost, that one could be sure of nothing, and such other things. In the mean time their Adversaries endeavour to prove the Truth of their Opinions, and sometimes prove it so clearly, that the contrary Opinion cannot be maintain'd without Obstinacy. The Unbelievers who are as it were a third Party, and perform only the part of Spectators of those Quarrels, conclude from thence that the Christian Religion is not truer than the Doctrines which they see so well confuted; and those who have exaggerated too much the Importance of their Opinions, can't hinder the Unbelievers from drawing such a Consequence against them.

There are but too many Examples of that ill manner of disputing; but I shall alledg only one, which will be sufficient to make Men sensible of what I say. There have been many Disputes in this Age about the Antiquity of the Jewish *Vowels*. Some have

have maintain'd that they were invented by the *Maſorethes* ſome Centuries after Chriſt. Others have pretended on the contrary, that they were at leaſt as antient as *Eſdras*, and conſequently grounded upon the Authority of the Prophets. The latter, to ſtir, if it were poſſible, all *Chriſtendom* againſt their Adverſaries, exclaim'd after a tragical manner, that this Diſpute was about no leſs a thing than the Authority of the Old Teſtament, and of the whole Bible, which was deſtroy'd by thoſe who aſſerted the Novelty of the Vowels. But *Ludovicus Cappellus* has ſhew'd in his *Arcanum Punctationis*, and its *Defence*, with as much Evidence as can be deſir'd in a thing of that nature, that the *Maſorethes* were the Authors of thoſe Vowels. The moſt learned Criticks have imbrac'd his Opinion, and look'd upon thoſe who maintain'd the contrary as obſtinate Perſons. The ſame happen'd with reſpect to another Diſpute which that learned Man had concerning the *various Readings* of the Old Teſtament.

He prov'd that there are many Readings which may be preferr'd before thoſe of our modern Copies. Did it follow from thence, as his Adverſaries would have it, that the Authority of the Scripture ſhould be deſtroy'd, Unbelievers would undoubtedly have reaſon to triumph, and it would be impoſſible to make

any tolerable Reply to them. But *Cappellus* shew'd very clearly that nothing can be more false than this Consequence, as well as that which is drawn from the Novelty of the Vowels; and so he freed the Authority of the Scripture from those Insults of Unbelievers, to which his Adversaries had expos'd it.

'Tis manifest that there are scarce any more effectual means to confirm Unbelievers in their Obstinacy, than the drawing of such Consequences. For they hear on the one side some grave and much esteem'd Teachers say after a doleful manner, that if certain Opinions are not true, then Religion is lost; and on the other hand, they see Men of great Learning not only acknowledg those Opinions, but also maintain them with very good Reasons. They conclude from thence that nothing can be less certain than Religion, by the Confession even of a Part of those that profess it. 'Tis to no purpose to undertake to prove the contrary to them, by rejecting some Opinions grounded upon very solid Arguments; whatever the Defenders of the opposite Opinion can tell them, will only serve to make them pass for conceited Men, and of no great Sincerity.

This helps them also to perceive in many Divines a strange Disposition, which would dishonour the Christian Religion, if it had any hand in it, *viz.* it does plainly

ly appear, that they ſeek not what's true, but what they think proper to maintain the Doctrines they have embrac'd. When they fancy that if a certain thing was be-liev'd, ſome of their Doctrines might be doubted of, they don't trouble themſelves with inquiring whether their Fancy be ill grounded, or whether that thing can be prov'd or not, as they ſhould do; but they cry out in a woful manner, *That ſuch an Opinion is dangerous*; that is to ſay, it cannot be eaſily reconcil'd with Religion, as they fancy. This is the true Character of a Pleader, who is not very ſure of being in the right; he ſuppreſſes whatever ſeems to him any way contrary to what he defends, whether it be true or falſe, if he is afraid it might appear from thence that he is in the wrong. Such is the Conduct of the Governour of a Place, who wanting Skill or Courage ſhould ſay, that if ſome ill-fortifi'd and inconſiderable Out-work were taken by the Enemies, he muſt unavoidably ſurrender the Fortreſs. Thoſe who obſerv'd the Conduct of both, would preſently ſuſpect the Pleader to be in the wrong, and the Governour to be ſenſible of the weakneſs of the Place, and that neither of them hopes to make a good Reſiſtance.

Unbelievers have the ſame Thoughts concerning Divines, when they obſerve that they greedily collect and catch at what-

whatever can in any manner make their Cause better, or at least make it appear so. But what ought to be said, is, that those Divines don't know very well the Truth of Religion, and stick to it only by a Spirit of Faction or Interest. The Christian Religion is grounded upon clear and undeniable Arguments; it stands in need of no weak Reasons to support it; it needs but appear naked, and such as it came from Heaven, to put an end to all sorts of Difficulties. If any one who do's not understand it, and loves not Truth, but only the worldly Advantages that attend it, seem to be afraid for Religion; it will never want more able Defenders, who will be devoted to it out of a Principle worthy of so holy a Doctrine. They will never be afraid as long as Religion is only assaulted with Reasons and Arguments.

CHAP. VII.

That the Difficulties which may occur in the Christian Religion, ought not to make any doubt of the Truth thereof.

1. THE abovemention'd Difficulties rather concern some Modern Divines than the Christian Religion, which they

they explain or defend not so well as they should. But because there is no Science without some Difficulties, however it be understood; it must be confest that there are some in the Christian Religion: of which I speak in this Chapter, wherewith I shall conclude this Work. First I'll make some general Reflections upon the Difficulties which may occur in the Christian Theology; and then I'll alledg some particular Examples thereof, whereby I'll shew, that they ought not to make any Body doubt of its Truth.

There may be two sorts of Difficulties in a Science; some of which don't shake its Principles; but others shew it is no Science at all, tho so call'd, but a Collection and a heap of ill-grounded Opinions and Conjectures. For Example; There are indeed some Difficulties in *Geometry*, but no Body doubts of the truth of its Principles: The Reason of which is, because they are all grounded upon clear Proofs, and which can neither become obscure, nor doubtful. Whatever difficulty there may be, with respect to a Proposition following from those Principles, they don't change their Nature; and a Man is more apt to accuse himself of not understanding *Geometry* well, than to doubt of it, because he can't resolve a Difficulty: or else they shew that the Proposition in question is of such a nature as not to be

fully

fully reſolv'd. On the contrary, there are ſome Difficulties rais'd againſt *Judiciary Aſtrology*, which not only perplex thoſe who are fond of it, but alſo are the Cauſe why all its Principles are look'd upon as falſe, and all that pretended Science as a heap of Chimerical Thoughts. The reaſon of that Difference is, becauſe the Principles of *Geometry* are either meer *Definitions*, or *Maxims* clear of themſelves, or demonſtrated *Propoſitions*: whereas *Judiciary Aſtrology* is only grounded upon falſe Suppoſitions. So that aſſoon as the Truths on which a Science is grounded, have been demonſtrated, and there is no fault in thoſe Demonſtrations; whatever Difficulty there may be in any Propoſition drawn from them, we don't look upon that Science to be leſs certain.

Now to apply that Obſervation to the Chriſtian Religion, and to the Difficulties which Unbelievers find in it; The firſt thing to be done, when any Objection is rais'd againſt Chriſtianity, is to ſee whether that Objection directly ſhews that the Proofs thereof are falſe. Tho nothing could be anſwer'd to that Difficulty, if thoſe that raiſe it can't reply to the direct Proofs of Chriſtianity, that Difficulty does not weaken the ſtrength of the Proofs; and all that can be ſaid is, that the Objection is about a Thing which we do not well underſtand, or that the Chriſtian

ſtian Theology is not perfectly known to us. Wherefore the Incredulous act not wiſely, when they reject the Chriſtian Religion, becauſe of ſome Difficulties, tho they are not able to confute the Proofs on which it is eſtabliſh'd. Now I maintain that there is no Difficulty can deſtroy thoſe Proofs; and if Unbelievers will mind it, they may obſerve that moſt of their Objections have no relation to them.

That Obſervation is of very great moment, when the Queſtion is about ſome Facts, which happen'd many Centuries ago, and are atteſted by ſome Hiſtorians, whoſe Knowledg and Sincerity have been well prov'd. Altho one may raiſe ſome Difficulties, with reſpect to ſome Circumſtances, which can't be now eaſily reſolv'd; yet if thoſe Difficulties deſtroy not the direct Proofs we have of the ſincerity of the Hiſtorians, and the exact knowledg they had of what they related, they ought not to make us doubt of the Truth of the Hiſtory. To be able to anſwer all the Queries which may be made about a Relation, one ſhould have been an Eye-witneſs of whatever it contains: and a Hiſtory can't be look'd upon as fabulous, becauſe no Body can ſatisfy us now about it, if we have no reaſon to ſuſpect the Hiſtorians from whom we have it, of want of Honeſty or Knowledg. I could eaſily clear this Matter with ſome Inſtances; but

but it would carry me too far.

To go on with the Compariſon I us'd, two ſorts of Objections may be rais'd againſt ſuch a Science as Geometry, and the Chriſtian Theology. Some do only require the exact knowledg of two or three Propoſitions, to be fully reſolv'd; and ſo they may be anſwer'd in few words. But others require a long Concatenation of many Propoſitions, depending one upon another; ſo that one can't be convinc'd of the laſt, before he is ſure of the Truth and Connexion of many others. In ſuch a Caſe 'tis impoſſible to ſatisfy in few words, thoſe to whom all thoſe Propoſitions, or the greateſt part of them, are unknown; becauſe they ought to examine them one after another.

Notwithſtanding, it has been obſerv'd ſeveral times, that ſome Men who have ſome Difficulties about Religion, would have their Objections preſently reſolv'd, without having any regard to what I ſaid; tho that Reſolution neceſſarily ſuppoſes the knowledg of ſeveral other things, which they are ignorant of. Becauſe 'tis impoſſible to ſatisfy them without inſtructing them in thoſe things; and becauſe they grow preſently weary with a long Diſcourſe, 'tis a difficult matter to make them ſenſible of their Miſtake. Tho it be their Fault, if they retire without being well pleas'd with thoſe to whom they

they propos'd their Objections, seeing they would not hear them; they fancy they have forc'd them to be silent, or to speak of something else. 'Tis just as if a Man, altogether ignorant of *Geometry*, should hear another speak of *Asymptot Lines*, or that approach nearer and nearer *in infinitum*, without ever touching one another, and would know, in two or three words, how that can be. No Mathematician could make him understand it in so short a time. If hereupon that Man should say, that there are very great Falsities in *Geometry*, and that that Science is not more certain than several others; what other Judgment could be made of him, but that he is the most unreasonable of all Men, seeing he would judg of a Thing, the Knowledg of which depends upon many more, without knowing them? The same may be said of those, who propose any difficulty about an Article of Religion, which can't be understood without the help of some others, and are angry because they are not answer'd in a word.

Some who want not Wit, and doubt of the Christian Religion, or reject it because they find some Difficulties in it, do most times make a most unreasonable supposition, without being sensible of it, *viz.* That whatever they do not distinctly comprehend, is not true; as if Human Knowledg ought necessarily to comprehend whatever

whatever exists, or is done in Nature. I could easily shew that there is an infinite number of things which our Knowledg can't attain to; but it will suffice to observe here, that the Principle of the Unbelievers, which I mention'd just now, is a meer Supposition they are pleas'd to make, because they imagine it raises them above what they are. I maintain that this Proposition can't be denied, *viz. That there may really be some things, the* Modus *or Manner of which Humane Nature can't know at present, tho it studies for it never so much.* It ought to be observ'd that I do not say, there may be some things contrary to our distinct Notions, which is impossible; but only that it may be, we have not the Knowledg that is requir'd, or the Means of acquiring it, to know some things; which notwithstanding are not contrary to what we certainly know. 'Tis necessary to make that distinction, because several People, who are not aware of it, confound things that are extreamly different. We cannot believe what is really contrary to our clear Notions; but we believe an infinite number of things, tho we know not how they come to pass.

Most Unbelievers are commonly guilty of another Fault, which is less excusable than the former. Instead of being in such a Disposition as is necessary for such as seek after Truth, they act like Men who only strive

ſtrive to get the better, without inquiring who is in the Right or in the Wrong. They wrangle as much as they can, and if thoſe with whom they diſpute, do it unſucceſsfully, they'll be ſure to take advantage of it, as if the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion depended upon that. They will not ſhew thoſe, who do not defend Religion well, what Miſtakes they are guilty of, but only labour to make advantage of it, that they may the more eaſily triumph over them.

But when the Queſtion is concerning a thing of that nature, about which no Man can deceive others, without doing himſelf a greater prejudice: and when Truth is equally advantageous to every Body, Men ſhould only labour to find it out, and inſtead of inſulting thoſe who can't ſhew the way to it, they ſhould endeavour to put them in the right way. The Spirit of Diſpute is altogether inconſiſtent with the ſearch of Truth; and a Heathen Philoſopher ſaid well, † *That thoſe who will rightly judg of Truth, ought to be Arbitrators, not Parties.* Aſſoon as one has put on the Character of an Adverſary, he thinks no more of Truth, but of the Glory which may be gotten by triumphing over him whom he has aſſaulted. He is only intent upon his Adverſary's way of reaſoning, to take him up upon all Occaſions, but not to endeavour to

† Ariſt. lib. 1. de Cœlo, c. 10.

find out a better: He considers no longer the thing in question, as the subject of his Enquiry, but of his Censure: He views it on every side, to find fault with it, not to know what it is grounded upon. 'Tis certain that this is an ill disposition of Mind, and Unbelievers themselves cannot deny it.

After what has been said, 'tis no wonder if Men, who shut their Eyes against the clear and beautiful part of the Christian Religion, and only open them to see what's obscure and difficult in it, that they may find fault with something or other, should at last grow so conceited of their pretended Sagacity, as to be almost incurable. Such a Disposition is not at all agreeable to the love of Truth, which they profess, and can only serve to increase one's Errors. And indeed what Truth can he find out, who only seeks an Occasion of disputing and overcoming? Truth, which often flies from those that seek it with Application, offers not it self to the sight of those that fly from it.

After those general Observations concerning the Difficulties that are offer'd against Religion, I must alledg some particular Examples of the chief Doctrines which Unbelievers are wont to assault. There is none they more frequently speak against, than what Christians believe concerning the Creation of the World; and it

it is of so great Moment, that it may be said this Doctrine being once well prov'd, 'tis no hard matter to get the rest admitted; whereas if it remains doubtful, the other Doctrines of Religion will necessarily be uncertain. All Revelation depends upon this, viz. *That there is a God, who created Heaven and Earth:* And he that begins not with that, can make no Progress in the Knowledg of Religion. So that it will be necessary to prove it in few words.

There are two sorts of Beings; some, call'd *Spirits*, Perceive, Will, Feel, and Reason; the other, who have no Understanding, are Extended, Divisible, and Solid, and are call'd *Bodies*. Those Spirits and Bodies are variously modifi'd, as we see or know by Experience. This is all that we know in the World, besides God. The Christian Religion teaches us that those Spirits and Bodies, with all their Properties, had a Beginning, and that they were created by a Being, who has no Beginning. This is what Unbelievers say they cannot apprehend, and it seems to them that every thing was always as it is now.

To know whether there is any appearance of Truth in what they say, we must examin those two sorts of Beings, and see whether they contain any thing, whereby we may suspect that they are Eternal.

As to Spirits, we only know our own Souls well, and Unbelievers acknowledg no other. Now I ask of them whether they perceive any thing in their Minds, which induces them to ſuſpect that they are Eternal? 'Tis certain that there is no ſuch thing, unleſs they will ſay that Ignorance and Weakneſs are Characters of Eternity. If we examin Bodies, which are inferior to Spirits, becauſe they are without Underſtanding, we ſhall ſee nothing in them neither, which may make one believe that they are Eternal.

There are but two things that can be conſider'd in this latter kind of Beings, *viz.* Matter and Form; and if neither of them affords us any reaſon to believe that they have always been, we cannot affirm it. As for the Matter of Bodies, 'tis but a Subſtance Extended, Solid, Diviſible, and capable of Motion, and all ſorts of Figures. That collection of Qualities, which makes up the Eſſence of all Bodies, as far as it is known to us, contains nothing that looks like Eternity. The notion of this Property, however it be conſider'd, cannot be found in that Collection. So that it cannot be affirm'd that the Matter of Bodies is Eternal.

All that can be ſaid thereupon may be reduc'd to theſe two things. Firſt, That one cannot conceive how meer *Extenſion* had a Beginning; becauſe notwithſtanding all

all our endeavours to think upon the Time when God was alone, before Bodies were created, a ſimple and boundleſs Extenſion always offers it ſelf to the Mind. But a meer Extenſion, in which we apprehend no Solidity, is not a Body; as it appears by the abovemention'd Definition of a Body. There is another manifeſt Proof of it, *viz.* becauſe meer Extenſion is Indiviſible and Boundleſs, as we perceive it by trying to divide or put ſome bounds to it in our Mind; whereas all Bodies are Diviſible, and continu'd within Bounds. So that all that could be concluded from thence, is, that the Place of Bodies is Eternal.

Secondly, Unbelievers ſay that they cannot apprehend how ſuch a Subſtance as that of Bodies ſhould be *produc'd out of Nothing*, as the Chriſtians ſay. If *to be created out of Nothing*, ſignifi'd to have no preexiſtent Cauſe, and yet to begin to exiſt, I confeſs that would be altogether impoſſible. For ſuppoſing that nothing exiſts but a meer Extenſion, how can it be conceiv'd that a ſolid and diviſible Subſtance ſhould be form'd in it? One might as well apprehend that all ſorts of Beaſts, Plants and Minerals may ſpring forth out of the Air, without any Productive Cauſe. But *to be created out of Nothing*, ſignifies to have a Cauſe, which contains in a more excellent manner the Proprieties which we

ſee in the things created, beſides an infinite number of others; from which Cauſe the things created have their Exiſtence, or by the Will whereof they begin actually to exiſt. There is nothing in all this that's contradictory; and if we do not clearly apprehend wherein the Action of the Cauſe, which creates out of nothing, conſiſts, 'tis becauſe the Nature of that Cauſe is not perfectly known to us.

To explain what I have ſaid by an undeniable Example, no Man will deny that there is in Nature a Principle of Motion different from Matter, ſeeing we perceive that Matter moves not of it ſelf. All that we perceive in it, is *Mobility*, but it cannot be ſaid that we have any reaſon to believe that Matter moves and modifies it ſelf. This being ſo, the immaterial Principle of Motion, whatever it be, *produces* Motion in Matter *out of nothing*; that is to ſay, being able to move, without having the imperfections of Actual Motion, he makes Motion to begin to exiſt in Matter, which before was in the ſtate of Reſt. This is a Fact which cannot be doubted of, ſeeing Motion exiſts, and Matter is not the Cauſe of it. But 'tis not known how a Being uncapable of Motion, ſeeing it is not Material, can produce it in Matter. If any one ſhould ſay that Motion is Eternal, becauſe he can't apprehend how it can have a Beginning; he might be referr'd

ferr'd to Experience, which teaches us that we move our Arms and Feet when we pleaſe, after they have been at reſt, tho we don't know how it is done. I know ſome Philoſophers ſay, that we only determin the Actual Motion of the Animal Spirits, which move our Members as many ways as we pleaſe. I will not here confute that Conjecture, (for 'tis only a meer Conjecture) but I maintain that 'tis as difficult a thing to apprehend that an immaterial Being determines a Motion a certain way, as to apprehend that he produces it anew. So that if thoſe Philoſophers may be allow'd to affirm the one; or if they cannot deny it, tho they apprehend not how it comes to paſs; it would be a great piece of Injuſtice to find fault with thoſe that ſay there is an immaterial Principle which produc'd Motion in Matter, tho it is not known how he did it.

This being undeniable, I conclude from it, that tho I have no diſtinct Idea of the Manner after which God may have produc'd Bodies out of nothing, yet I can't deny it: eſpecially if we obſerve in Matter no Character of Eternity, 'tis an abſurd thing even to ſuſpect that it is Eternal; and much more abſurd ſtill to find fault with Chriſtian Divines, who ſay that it was created out of Nothing.

Tho nothing can hinder us from grounding the Creation of the World upon

on that Foundation; yet it muſt be confeſt that the Chriſtian Religion, which was inſtituted for illiterate Men, as well as for Scholars, do's not neceſſarily ſuppoſe theſe ſorts of things which require a greater Meditation than the Vulgar is capable of. It's enough to apprehend that God imparted to Matter the Form it now has, to pay to him all the Duties which he requires from us in the Goſpel. So that, without ſuppoſing what I have prov'd concerning the Creation of the Matter of Bodies, we muſt inquire whether there is any Reaſon to believe that the Form they have is Eternal.

There is nothing in the Form no more than in Matter, which can make us ſuſpect, that the World, as it is now, never had a Beginning. Tho we have not ſeen the Formation of the great Bodies that ſurround us, and not one Eye-witneſs has left a Relation of it; tho it ſeems that little or no ſenſible Alteration happens in the World in general; yet no Body can ſay for all that, that it has been the ſame from all Eternity; becauſe the World might have been fram'd before there was any Man upon the Earth.

But beſides, we cannot ſay that the Form of the World is Eternal, and conſequently that Men, and other Animals (which make a part of it) have always been upon Earth; the perpetual Succeſſion, which we

we ſee in their Kinds, do's plainly teach us, that they had a Beginning. It can't be ſaid that the Animals who live at preſent, are born of their Fathers and Mothers, and Theſe after the ſame manner, and ſo *in infinitum*, ſo as never to come to the firſt. The Reaſon of it is, becauſe Beings that have a limited Duration, as that of every Generation is, cannot equal Eternity by ſuch a Duration: as a number of limited Meaſures, tho never ſo great, cannot be equal to an infinite Extenſion. Every Generation ſingly taken having had a Beginning, we muſt neceſſarily come to the Beginning of thoſe Generations.

'Tis therefore manifeſt, that Men and Beaſts began to exiſt upon Earth, and conſequently that they were form'd by ſome Cauſe. *Epicurus*, who ſaid that they were form'd by a fortuitous Concourſe of Atoms, made more ridiculous Suppoſitions, and more abſurd Conjectures, than what we find in the antient Fables. Hence it is that no body maintains his *Hypotheſis* now. But others ſay, that whatever exiſts, is properly but one Being, that modifi'd it ſelf by a neceſſary Conſequence from its Nature. If any body knew what they mean, or if they knew it themſelves, they might be confuted; but an Opinion that is ſo abſurd and nonſenſical, tho it has the outward Appearance of a Geometrical Order, can deceive no body but thoſe

thoſe who will be deceiv'd, and are inclin'd to it from ſome other Reaſons.

Wherefore ſeeing nothing can give a Beginning to it ſelf, it muſt be confeſs'd that there is a Being more excellent than all Animals, who form'd them upon this Earth; and this is that Being which Chriſtians call GOD: Thus they muſt of neceſſity acknowledg a God who has created us.

'Tis an eaſy thing to prove that he created the Sun and the Planets; becauſe limited Periods, as thoſe of the Planets are, can never exhauſt Eternity, tho they be never ſo much multipli'd. So that we may very well ſay, *that there is a Maker of Heaven and Earth*; and no Objection can force us to renounce that Propoſition, ſeeing we directly prove it by undeniable Arguments; and the Objections that may be oppos'd to them do not deſtroy them, and are but the natural Effects of our Ignorance.

They object, for example, That they cannot apprehend how God, who is ſuppos'd to be immaterial, could create Bodies out of nothing. *None can give what he has not*, ſay they; ſo that God being incorporeal, could not give to Bodies the Proprieties which they have. But it ought to be obſerv'd, that this very Argument will prove that there is no Motion in Nature; for one may ſay, Matter has no

Motion

Motion of it self; and that which is immaterial has less still: None can give what he has not; wherefore Matter has no Motion. Let them try to answer this Argument, and the Answer, if it be good, will resolve the propos'd Objection against the Creation of Matter. It may be said, that God contains the real Proprieties of all Beings, but without having the Imperfections and Defects of them, seeing 'tis certain he has created them, and he is infinitely more perfect than all the Things to which he gave a Beginning. By this Argument we ascend from the Effects to the Cause, but we don't learn by it, nor by any other Argument, how the real Proprieties of Creatures are in God, nor how he made them to exist. The Fact is as certain as the Manner of it is above human Understanding, as well as the Origin of Motion, tho no body can doubt of its Existence.

There is another thing which the Incredulous will not believe, *viz.* the Revelation which we say is contain'd *in the Old and New Testament.* Whatever they say concerning Revelation in general, is grounded upon this Prejudice, *viz.* that they themselves having no Experience of a Revelation, they can't be perswaded that there has been any. But nothing can be weaker than Arguments grounded only upon our Ignorance, and which suppose that

that what we know not is not true, as I have already obſerv'd. Thoſe who deny Revelation, ſhould either manifeſtly prove that God cannot reveal himſelf to his Creatures after an extraordinary manner, which no body will ever be able to prove, or find out in that Revelation ſome manifeſt Characters of Falſity, which no body can ſhew in the Revelation of Holy Scripture.

This might be ſufficient to ſtop the Mouths of Unbelievers; but their Repugnancy to believe the Chriſtian Religion ariſing partly from their being ignorant of the Hiſtory thereof, and not perceiving how the Wiſdom of God appears in it, I ſhall ſet down that Hiſtory in a few Words.

Men knowing nothing but by Experience and Reflection; and Experience being ſlow, and Reflection often-times difficult, God ſhew'd them by ſome Revelations, from the Beginning of the World, what they ought to know concerning his Nature, and the Worſhip he requir'd from them. Tho *Moſes* has given us but a ſhort Abridgment of the Hiſtory of what paſt during above two thouſand Years, before he receiv'd the Law of God; yet he mentions † ſeveral Revelations, and every where ſuppoſes that they were very frequent, as all thoſe who have read the Book of *Geneſis* know very well. But it appears

† Gen. 3. 3. 9, &c. & 6. 13. & 7. 1. & 8. 15. & 9. 1. & 12. 1, &c.

appears that Men made not a very good Uſe of them. The *Egyptians*, one of the moſt antient and happy Nations in the World, were already in his time infected with a ſhameful Idolatry, * which made them worſhip Beaſts. The *Cananeans* were alſo Idolaters, as he ſays † in many Places, and liv'd a very wicked Life. There is no likelihood that the other neighbouring Nations made a better Uſe of thoſe antient Revelations, or the Light of Reaſon, which God has given to all Men.

* *See* Exod. 8. 16. & 32. 4.
† Lev. 20. 2. Numb. 25. 3, &c.

So that there was not one Nation that could boaſt to have improv'd the Talents it receiv'd from Heaven, as it ought to do; and if God had given them up to their Darkneſs and Wickedneſs, none of them could have juſtly complain'd of him. Notwithſtanding, to paſs by the Nations whoſe Hiſtory is not well known to us, God being mov'd with Compaſſion towards Men, would not permit that Idolatry and corrupt Manners ſhould, as it were, overflow the whole World. He continu'd to reveal himſelf more particularly to the Family of *Abraham* and his Poſterity; and to make thoſe Revelations more uſeful, and hinder them from being corrupted by the Mixture of the falſe Opinions of other Nations, he order'd the Iſraelites to frame a Commonwealth by it ſelf, and forbad them to converſe much

with

with their Neighbours. To frame that Commonwealth, and enable it to maintain it self till he should think fit to call the other Nations to the same Knowledg the Hebrews had, he gave them some Laws, the Observation whereof he requir'd under most severe Penalties. There are several things to be observ'd in those Laws, which may help us to see the Wisdom contain'd in them; but it will suffice to say that some of them are grounded upon the very Constitution of Nature and humane Society; so that all Nations are bound to observe them, at least in some measure, and that they cannot be violated without hurting the Society. They are call'd *Moral Laws*. The other do so concern the Commonwealth of the Hebrews in particular, that other Men are not the worse for not observing them; and they are call'd *Political Laws*. Lastly, the other concern the Ceremonies which God would have to be observ'd in his Worship. They are stil'd *Ceremonial Laws*.

The first sort of Laws, as those which command to acknowledg a God, and to worship him, to honour our Parents, and to do to our Neighbour as we would be done by; that sort of Laws, I say, was approv'd by the wisest Heathen Legislators and Philosophers; and Jesus Christ has since confirm'd them. The necessity of those Laws can't be doubted of, seeing they

they can't be neglected without feeling the dismal Effects of that Neglect; and seeing the Nature of humane Society necessarily requires the Observation of those Laws, it can't be doubted but that they are worthy of him to whom humane Nature owes its Origin. Tho this is manifest, it would be an easy thing to shew that several Nations had many Laws contrary to them, because the Interests and Passions of some private Men prevail'd above the publick Good. Lest therefore the Light that was contrary to those ill Customs should be wholly extinguish'd among Men, it was necessary that there should be at least one Nation upon Earth, in which good and sound Laws should be so clearly and undeniably establish'd, that no body could doubt of them. This we find among the Jews: God himself deliver'd part of those Laws with his own Mouth, and acquainted them with the rest by a Prophet whom he authoriz'd with Miracles.

Those Laws are, as I said, equally necessary at all times, and in all places, in order to the Peace and Happiness of humane Society: but because it was necessary that the Commonwealth of the Jews should not be mix'd with other Nations, lest those Laws should be destroy'd, God gave them some other Laws accommodated to the *Genius* of that People, and to their

their State in the Land of *Canaan*, which they were to poſſeſs. Such are the Political and Ceremonial Laws; the chief Excellency of which conſiſts in having nothing that is contrary to the Moral Laws, and in being ſuted to the People who receiv'd them. One may eaſily perceive that the Political and Ceremonial Laws of *Moſes* contain nothing that's contrary to the Moral ones: but to convince ones ſelf that God could give no Laws more ſutable to the State and *Genius* of the Jews, one ought to have a competent Knowledge of the Manners of the Nations among which they had liv'd, and with which they were then ſurrounded. Thoſe who have appli'd themſelves to that Study, have found out that a great part of thoſe Laws were like thoſe of the neighbouring Nations, and that they were alſo || contrary to them in ſeveral things; ſo that it may be ſaid that God, accommodating himſelf to the *Genius* of the Iſraelites, took care ſo to diſtinguiſh the Form of their Commonwealth and Worſhip, from that of their Neighbours, that it was impoſſible they ſhould mix themſelves with them, as long as they ſhould obſerve thoſe Laws. I will not come to the Particulars of thoſe Facts, becauſe I have treated of them at large in the Latin Book which I juſt now quoted in the Margin.

|| *See my* Commentary *upon the* Pentateuch.

As

As God had settl'd those Laws chiefly by his Authority, or that of a Prophet authoriz'd with Miracles, so he still requir'd the Observation of them, not only by the ordinary Magistrates who might themselves neglect them in time, but also by several Prophets whom he sent to the Jews from time to time to censure them for their Vices, and excite them to obey him by some Rewards and Punishments, which they preach'd in his Name.

All the Laws that have relation to a certain State of a Nation, which makes them useful and necessary, do evidently suppose that they are only good, as long as that State lasts; and such were the Political and Ceremonial Laws of the Jews. Notwithstanding the Law-giver, who would give no body an occasion of breaking his Laws, on pretence that they were no longer necessary, and so of overthrowing the Commonwealth of the Jews before the time, speaks every-where of them as of *eternal* Laws. He kept to himself the Power of abrogating them when the time should come, lest the Jews should do it unseasonably, and after a manner contrary to his Intention.

In the mean time the Prophets whom he sent to keep the Jews to their Duty, or to bring them to it, were order'd to say many things, which by degrees dispos'd that People to what was to happen some time

or other, that is, to ſee themſelves mix'd with all the other Nations, and to obſerve only ſuch Laws as are of an eternal Uſe, and grounded on the Conſtitution of humane Nature. For example, *Jeremiah* was commanded to ſay to the Jews of his time; * *The Days come, ſaith the* † *Creator, that I will make a new Covenant with the Houſe of* Iſrael, *and with the Houſe of* Judah: *not according to the Covenant which I made with their Fathers in the day that I took them by the Hand to bring them out of the Land of* Egypt—*But this ſhall be the Covenant that I will make with the Houſe of* Iſrael, *After thoſe Days I will put my Law in their inward Parts, and write it in their Hearts*; (that is, it will be of ſuch a Nature that Reaſon only will almoſt teach it, and they will eaſily remember it) *and I will be their God, and they ſhall be my People: And they ſhall teach no more every Man his Neighbour, and every Man his Brother, Know the Lord; for they ſhall all know me, from the leaſt of them unto the greateſt of them*, &c. This clearly denotes ſome new Laws, which one might eaſily learn and remember; whereas it was not ſo with the Ceremonial Laws of *Moſes*, which can neither be eaſily remembr'd nor underſtood. Another Prophet introduces God ſpeaking thus; || *From the riſing of the Sun even unto the going down of the ſame, my Name ſhall be great among the Gentiles; and in every Place in-*

* Ch. 31. 31, *&c.*

† *So the word* Jehovah *may be render'd. See my Remarks upon* Exod. 6. 3.

|| Mal. 1. 11.

cenſe

cense shall be offer'd unto my Name, and a pure Offering; for my Name shall be great among the Heathen.

There are also some Promises in the Prophets concerning him whom God was to send to instruct the Jews more clearly in his last Intention, as in the 53*d* Chapter of *Isaiah*, wherein God says, amongst other things; *By his Knowledg shall my righteous Servant justify many, and he shall bear their Iniquities.* Elsewhere he is represented as a King: * *Thou* Bethlehem Ephratah, *tho thou be little among the thousands of* Judah, *yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be Ruler in* Israel. Tho it is no easy thing to prove now to the Jews or others, by some grammatical Arguments, that those Passages, and the like, concern the Deliverer who was promis'd to the Israelites; yet it appears by the History of the Gospel, and their most antient Teachers, that the Jews understood then the Prophecies in that Sense. It was a general Opinion that a King was to come, (whom they named *Messiah* by Excellency, that is to say *Anointed*, because Kings were anointed) and that he wou'd change the State of the Commonwealth of *Israel*. But neither the Words of the Prophets, nor what Tradition might have preserv'd of their Doctrine, were clear enough to give them a distinct and true Notion of the Person of that

* Mich. 5. 2. *See* Zech. 9. 9.

King, or the Nature of his Kingdom. Hence it is that they expected a King like thoſe whom they had formerly, who ſhould ſubdue their Neighbours to their Empire.

There are many ſuch Promiſes in the Prophets which I will not inſiſt upon, becauſe ſome few Examples will be ſufficient to ſhew the Deſign of the Revelation, and the Effect it wrought in the Minds of the People. The Jews having had ſome Prophets when they return'd from the Captivity of *Babylon*, had none ſince, at leaſt that we know of, to the time of the Empire of *Auguſtus*, which was the time appointed by the Divine Wiſdom, to ſend not only to the Jews, but to all Mankind, a new Law-giver, to inſtruct them more fully in the Knowledg of their Duty.

I muſt ſomewhat inſiſt upon this Place, to ſhew God's Wiſdom in the Choice of the Time wherein he ſent Chriſt to the World. The Jews ſtood no more in need of ſuch Prophets as the foregoing were, to require from them the Obſervation of the Law of *Moſes*, and cenſure their Vices. The Writings of the antient Prophets, which they read then more carefully than ever they did, were ſufficient for that. There was no need neither to make further Promiſes of a Meſſiah by new Revelations; they thought they perceiv'd him clearly enough in the Old. But they ſtood

In

in great need of two things. The one was to learn that the true Worſhip of God do's not conſiſt in Ceremonies, but in entertaining noble Thoughts of God, and in praying to, and truſting in him, and in loving one's Neighbour as himſelf. It ought to be obſerv'd that by the word *Neighbour* we muſt underſtand all Men in general. The other thing the Jews wanted then, was to know certainly that there is a future Life, and that God will reward good Men, and puniſh the Wicked after this Life.

The Jews entertain'd a moſt pernicious Error concerning the firſt thing, *viz.* that the Obſervation of the Ceremonies was the chief thing Men could do to be acceptable to God, whereas thoſe Ceremonies were but ſome Laws which God had giv'n them out of Condeſcenſion, and to keep them ſeparate from other Nations, until a certain time; as it appears from the thing it ſelf, and Experience. Beſides, the Romans being then ready to deprive them of a ſmall Remainder of Liberty which they enjoy'd, and to take from them the Means of preſerving their Temple, it was very neceſſary that the Jews ſhould know that it was no great Loſs, ſeeing they would be no leſs acceptable to God, by worſhipping him only, and obeying his Moral Laws, tho they ſhould obſerve no longer the Ceremonial ones. Foraſmuch as they

were to be mix'd for ever with all Nations, their Commonweath being destroy'd without any hope of a Re-establishment; one of the most useful Advices that could be giv'n them, was to look upon all Men as their *Neighbours*. They were forbidden before to converse familiarly with them, as long as the Commonwealth of *Israel* should subsist; but after its total Destruction there was no room left for that Distinction; nay, it was impossible. The Re-union of the Jews with the rest of Mankind was most worthy of God, the common Father of all Men, who had separated his Children for a time, lest a general Corruption should overflow them.

As for what concerns a future Life, together with its Rewards and Punishments, it was altogether necessary that Christ should ground that Belief upon a new Foundation. The Prophets spoke not clearly enough upon that Point, and it can't be found in their Writings but by the help of several Consequences, and those sometimes extremely nice. That Doctrine is not expressly treated of therein, and there is nothing concerning it where any would think it should be handl'd at large, and in express Words, as in that Part of the Law wherein Rewards are promis'd to those who shall obey God, and Punishments denounc'd against those who shall break his Commandments.

Hence

Hence it is that the *Sadduces* laugh'd at that Doctrine, and pretended it was a vain Tradition. Yet 'tis certain that Religion runs a great Danger without this Doctrine, which is undoubtedly always neceſſary to excite Men to the Practice of Vertue, as I could eaſily ſhew; but it was eſpecially neceſſary to the Jews at that time. The Perſecutions of their Neighbours, or their own Diſſenſions, had reduc'd them to a miſerable Condition, and the temporal Promiſes of the Law were no more fulfill'd. Which made even good Men murmur, and the learn'd Men of that time were not at all able to hinder it, as it appears from the Authors of the *Wiſdom of* Solomon *and* Eccleſiaſticus, who are ſtrangely perplex'd with this Queſtion, * *Why wicked Men are often very happy in this Life, and thoſe that keep the Law very miſerable?* That Queſtion could not be otherways anſwer'd, than by ſaying, that God being not willing that the Commonwealth of *Iſrael* ſhould laſt longer, ceas'd to grant to the Obſervers of his Laws the Rewards he had promis'd them; and that calling them now to a more ſublime Vertue, he would grant them in another Life an infinitely more excellent Reward than the temporal Happineſs they wiſh'd for.

* *See* Wiſdom, *ch.* 4, & 5, *&c.*

'Tis true that the Phariſees aſſerted the Reſurrection of the Dead, and an eternal Life, but it ſeems they grounded their Be-

lief more upon Tradition than the expreſs Words of Scripture. Nay, they ſpake of another Life as the Heathens did, if we believe * *Joſephus*. To build ſo important a Doctrine upon a ſolid Foundation, nothing leſs could be requir'd than the Authority of the Meſſiah, who very clearly teaches it every-where, and was himſelf a ſenſible Example of what God will do for good Men: which made one of his Apoſtles ſay, † *that he has brought Life and Immortality to Light through the Goſpel.*

* Ant. Jud. lib. 18. c. 2.

† 2 Tim. 1. 10.

It appears from what has been ſaid, how neceſſary it was that Chriſt ſhould be born among the Jews at that very time, and how neceſſary and uſeful his Doctrine was to them. But perhaps it will be ask'd, why there was no Reaſon then to fear the Jews would corrupt themſelves among the Pagans, as they did formerly? The Reaſon of it is, becauſe the Belief of the Unity of a God, Maker of Heaven and Earth, and his Spirituality, were ſo rooted in the Minds of the Jews, that nothing could perſwade them to the contrary hereafter. The Jews were better qualifi'd, and more like to convert the Heathens, than the Heathens to draw the Jews to their Opinions, tho they had the uppermoſt. The moſt celebrated Philoſophers among the *Grecians* believ'd the Unity of a ſupreme God; and the Religion

gion of the *Mob*, which was built upon Fables, was not at all approv'd by Men of Senſe, as may be eaſily prov'd. So that the Jews ran not ſo great a danger, in that reſpect, as they did before. Beſides, it was none of the *Romans* Maxims to make Proſelytes, as the Jews did; ſo that they endeavour'd not, at leaſt commonly, to make them embrace their Opinions, either by cunning Arts, or by Force. They tolerated them every-where, provided they would obey the Laws which were not repugnant to their Religion.

Beſides, God, who was making every thing ready to call the Gentiles to his Knowledg, was ſhortly to form a great People in the midſt of Paganiſm, with whom the Jews might live without any danger of corrupting themſelves. But it will be ask'd, Why God ſtaid ſo long before he manifeſted himſelf to the Heathens? Perhaps what I ſaid juſt now, is one Reaſon of it, *viz.* leſt the Jews being oblig'd to live amongſt them, ſhould altogether corrupt themſelves, if Heatheniſm ſhould prevail every-where. But beſides, it may be ſaid that the *Romans* and *Grecians* were never better qualifi'd to receive the Goſpel. The Study of Philoſophy had in ſome meaſure deliver'd them from the Ignorance and Superſtition they lay under during many Ages; and the Grandeur of the Romans, who were not very

well

well perſwaded of the Truth of their Anceſtors Religion, did not allow them to mind whatever might be ſaid againſt their Gods. The Jews and Chriſtians have not more rail'd at them than the Epicureans, as it appears by the Example of *Lucian*. Tho the Diſcourſes of the Epicureans aroſe from a Principle of Atheiſm, altogether contrary to the Diſpoſition of the Jews and Chriſtians, yet they contributed much to facilitate the Belief of the Chriſtian Religion, becauſe the Epicureans knew very well how to deſtroy the Pagan Religion, but had no better Principles to eſtabliſh in its ſtead; whereas the Jews and Chriſtians had a very rational Syſtem to ſupply the room of the Heathenish Errors. Thus God, who can draw Light out of Darkneſs, made uſe of the Effect the Epicurean Philoſophy had wrought, to introduce his Knowledg more eaſily among the Heathens.

The moſt civiliz'd and frequented Parts of *Europe* and *Aſia* being at that time under one and the ſame Empire, and under ſome Laws that were juſt enough; the Peace which was then more general than it had been before, and the Safety wherewith Men might travel thro' the Roman Empire, did very much contribute to the Propagation of the Chriſtian Doctrine; ſo that it may be ſaid, that if God deſign'd to have Compaſſion on the Heathens,

it

it was then the time, or never, to call them to his Knowledg.

During those Circumstances, which I desire the Reader to recal to his Mind, God was pleas'd that a Law-giver should be born among the Jews, of another Nature than he whom they expected, and infinitely more useful to them. Instead of a temporal King, who might have increas'd their Power and Renown, but would not have lessen'd their Ignorance nor their Vices; God sent them a King worthy of him who taught them how they ought to live here, to be eternally happy after this Life; and shew'd them, that instead of being Members of a little Commonwealth, and Enemies to the rest of Mankind, they ought to look upon the whole World as their native Countrey, and all Men as their Fellow-Citizens; a Thought worthy of those who already profess'd to believe that all Men are equally the Work of God.

As for those Pagans who were not content with their own Religion, they made use in vain of the Light of their Philosophers, to find out something better, when Christianity happily offer'd it self to them, to free them from their Doubts. There was a general Corruption among them, proceeding from some having no Religion, and others ridiculous ones. 'Tis true that the Philosophers oppos'd that Corruption in

in some measure: but some of them exhorted Men to Vertue only as much as it was necessary for them in this Life, as the *Epicureans* which took off all the Force of their Discourses; others, as the *Platonicks* and *Stoicks*, mention'd indeed the Rewards, which may be expected after Death, but only in a doubtful manner, and without any Proof; so that their Exhortations were in effect very weak. Tho their Morals were fine indeed, yet there were several things in them to be found fault with, and their Theology was full of *Chimeras*, which now I will not insist upon. Then the Christian Religion appear'd with a Theology altogether agreeable to the Light of Reason, with so perfect a System of Morals, that it contains whatever the several Sects of Philosophers said, that was good, upon that Matter; and with Rewards and Punishments so certain, that Men are necessarily mov'd with them when they think of them. It must be confess'd that God could reveal nothing to Men that was more suitable to their needs, nor enlighten them in a more proper time.

It appears from thence that God had very good Reasons to manifest himself to the Jews and Heathens, as I have said. Not that I will affirm that those are precisely the Reasons of the Conduct of Providence, and that it had no other. My

De-

Design was only to make it appear that 'tis a very easy thing to shew the Wisdom thereof, and to stop the Mouths of Unbelievers; for if Men, notwithstanding their Ignorance, can give very probable Reasons of God's Conduct, how great a Light might he dart into our Minds, if he were pleas'd to draw off the Vail, if I may speak so, under which he hides himself?

I must make some more Observations upon the Persons whom he made use of to manifest himself to Men, because Unbelievers fancy that they should have been quite other Men than they were. They think that if God design'd to send any in his Name to Men, he should have chosen Men of Authority, to keep them in awe; and eloquent enough to excite the Attention of others, and write according to all the Rules of Eloquence what they design'd to leave to Posterity.

I confess that most of those whose Ministry God made use of to reveal his Will to Men, were not at all Persons of Authority. The Gospel it self, which is his last Revelation, was preach'd only by mean and ordinary Men, without any Dignity in the Commonwealth of the Jews. But I maintain that there are sensible Marks of God's Wisdom in that Choice, which could not appear in a contrary Choice. I will only speak of the first Preachers of the Gospel, because what I shall say of them may

may be easily appli'd to the Prophets of the Old Testament, who were Men of the same Condition.

Tho Christ was born of a Royal Line, his Family was become so poor, that he could make no great Figure among the Jews upon the score of his Extraction. Most of his Apostles were Fishermen, or Men of no greater Account: So that they had no Authority among their Countrymen whereby they might command any Respect. But that which seem'd proper to expose them to Contempt was the only thing that could authorize their Doctrine, especially in future Ages. To be convinc'd of it, let us suppose the contrary a little, and see what would be thought of it. If Christ and his Apostles had been Men of Authority, it might be said, with great shew of Reason, First, that they were Men of great Parts, who seeing the Jews in such a Corruption, which altogether destroy'd the Civil Society amongst them, as we learn from the History of that time, undertook to reform them, by feigning new Revelations, and authorizing these pretended Revelations by false Miracles. 'Tis a Design that Men of the first Rank may easily think of, and several have been accus'd of it, as *Lycurgus*, *Numa* *, and other Pagan Law-givers, who feign'd to have receiv'd their Laws from some Deity, to make them more sacred.

* *See* Plutarch *in their Lives*: Diodorus Siculus, Bibl. lib. 1. *towards the end.* Lactantius Inst. Div. lib. 1. c. 22.

cred. Secondly, it might be ſaid, that by giving better Laws to their Fellow-Citizens, as being come from Heaven, they not only did them good Service in deceiving them, but alſo that they themſelves got Credit by it, becauſe they were look'd upon as Miniſters of the Godhead. Thirdly, it would be ſaid that their Miracles were falſe, becauſe Men of Authority and Power may eaſily deceive others, by appointing ſome Men who favour their Deſign, and frighting by their Authority thoſe who could diſcover their Cheats. 'Twas, for example, an eaſy thing for *Numa Pompilius* to pretend that he had a particular Acquaintance with the Nimph *Egeria*, and perſwade the Romans that he went to ſee that Goddeſs every Night in a Wood, wherein he might eaſily hide ſome body who made them believe, by a thouſand Cheats which may eaſily come into one's Mind, that this Wood was the Reſidence of the Goddeſs. He might reward thoſe who favour'd his Deſign, and revenge himſelf of thoſe who ſhould endeavour to croſs it. So that it muſt be confeſs'd that Men of Authority preaching a new Revelation, might have been ſo much ſuſpected by their Contemporaries, and eſpecially by Poſterity, that it would have been a very difficult thing, to aſſure one's ſelf of their Sincerity.

On

On the contrary, 'tis manifeſt, that ſuch a Deſign of reforming the Jewiſh Nation, and even all Mankind, by feigning a falſe Revelation, could not eaſily come into the Mind of Men who had no Authority. So vaſt a Project is not for ordinary Men, who ſeldom entertain great Thoughts; and the Danger of being diſcover'd and puniſh'd by the Magiſtrates is more than ſufficient to deter them from doing it, if they had any ſuch Thoughts. They would be ſo far from hoping with any probability to get more Credit and Authority by ſuch a Cheat, that they would be afraid of being diſcover'd by their Superiours, who always ſuſpect ſuch Deſigns. Laſtly, Such Men can promiſe no Rewards to thoſe who aſſiſt them, nor threaten thoſe that croſs their Deſigns of revenging themſelves upon them. Their Superiours watch over their Actions, and won't allow them to meddle with any thing that is out of their Sphere, and will be ſure to puniſh them upon the firſt Motion they make. 'Tis therefore much more likely that Men of no Authority may act ſincerely on ſuch an occaſion, than thoſe of the firſt Rank. But there was nothing more neceſſary for all future Ages than to chuſe for the Preaching of the Goſpel, Men whoſe Honeſty could not be ſuſpected, ſeeing 'tis only upon their Sincerity that all our Belief is grounded.

And

And beſides, the Succeſs of the Preaching of the Goſpel by Men of no Authority, is a plain Evidence of the Finger of God, and the Strength of the Apoſtles Arguments; whereas the Succeſs of a Deſign contriv'd and put in execution by conſiderable Men, would be look'd upon as an Effect of their Authority, rather than of their Reaſons. * *God has choſen*, ſays one of Chriſt's Apoſtles, *the fooliſh things of the World to confound the Wiſe: and God has choſen the weak things of the World to confound the things which are mighty: and baſe things of the World, and things which are deſpis'd has God choſen; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are, that no Fleſh ſhould glory in his Preſence.* * 1 Cor. 1. 27, &c.

I come now to the Art and Eloquence which Unbelievers would require in the Writings of the Apoſtles, to believe that they are inſpir'd: but I affirm again, that that very thing would raiſe Suſpicions againſt them, and Doubts concerning the Truth of their Doctrine. Before I ſhew it, I muſt not forget to ſay, that I don't blame Art and Eloquence as being pernicious and uſeleſs on all occaſions. On the contrary, thoſe that make a good uſe of it, can't be too much eſteem'd, that is, thoſe who uſe it to vindicate and clear Truth, or to lead Men to Vertue. I only deſign to ſhew that it fell out better that

the firſt Preachers of the Goſpel were deſtitute of it.

Let us ſuppoſe again the contrary of what happen'd; and that the Apoſtles who left to Poſterity the Life, Diſcourſes and Doctrine of Jeſus Chriſt, were Men of great Eloquence, and perfect Maſters of the Art of Writing exactly and methodically. Let us ſuppoſe that their Writings as well as their Diſcourſes were compos'd with great Exactneſs, and all poſſible Elegancy; I'll tell you the Effect it would work upon the Minds of Men, eſpecially of thoſe who ſhould read them now. They would think that they were very ingenious Men, whoſe Learning and Eloquence had mov'd them to propagate their Doctrine through the whole World, and get Reputation by it; as it can't be doubted that 'twas *Plato*'s Deſign as well as of many other Philoſophers. It would be ſaid that thoſe Men, in order to convince others not only of the Excellency of their Morals, by the Eloquence of their Writings, but alſo to make them obſerve ſo excellent a Doctrine, out of a more powerful Motive, contriv'd all the Miracles contain'd in the Life of Chriſt. The more exact they had been in obſerving the Circumſtances of Time, Places, and Perſons; the more careful they had been to ſet off the wonderful Parts of that incomparable Life, and the Beauty of their Maſter's

Master's Thoughts, by their manner of expressing them, the more they would have been suspected of Artifice, especially in the following Ages, when what they said of Christ would be the only Reason of believing in him. Thus *Plato* * was suspected to have adorn'd the Discourses of *Socrates* his Master; nay it has been said, that he sent him some of his own Thoughts, as those who have any Knowledg of the Master and his Disciple can't doubt of it.

* Vid. Diogenes Laert. lib. 3. §. 3. & Interp. in h. loc.

The Success of the Gospel, which is no inconsiderable Mark of its Divinity, would be look'd upon as the Effect of the Eloquence of its first Preachers, not of an extraordinary Providence. It would have been said at most, that the Doctrine of the Apostles was the most excellent and rational Philosophy that had been taught till that time. But by granting the Truth of their moral Rules, they would have doubted of its Divinity, and look'd upon it rather as the effect of the Apostles Meditations, than a Divine Revelation.

But having written the Life of their Master, and publish'd his Discourses without any Art or Method, they can't be suspected neither to have contriv'd what they said, nor to have us'd any Artifice to make a Lie look with the Air of Truth. Their great Simplicity, which appears every where, and their taking no

care to impoſe upon the Reader, are evident Marks not only of their being not able to deceive, but alſo of their Sincerity. The wonderful Succeſs of their Preaching, tho deſtitute of whatever rais'd the Admiration of the Orators and Philoſophers, is a convincing Proof of their being favour'd by Heaven. * *My Speech and my Preaching*, ſays one of them, *was not with enticing Words of Mens Wiſdom, but in Demonſtration of the Spirit and of Power*, (to wit, in the Miracles) *that your Faith ſhould not ſtand in the Wiſdom of Men, but in the Power of God.*

* 1 Cor. 2. 4, 5.

If we reflect upon thoſe Circumſtances of the Revelation, and all the other, which at firſt ſeem to make one doubt of it, when they are not throughly examin'd, we ſhall ſee that God could not give more ſenſible Marks of the Care he took about it, but by chuſing thoſe whoſe Miniſtry he made uſe of to propagate it through the whole World.

I ſhall not undertake to reſolve the particular Objections which Unbelievers may raiſe againſt the Chriſtian Religion: the Anſwer to which muſt be look'd for in the Writings of thoſe who have directly prov'd the Truth of it, or written upon the Holy Scripture.

The

The Conclusion *of the Second Part.*

I Think I may conclude now (nor can Unbelievers accuſe me of drawing a Conſequence that extends farther than the Proofs I made uſe of) that nothing can be more falſe than to fancy that the Chriſtian Religion is grounded upon mere Credulity: That the Ignorance or corrupt Manners of thoſe who profeſs it, ought not to prejudice it in the leaſt: That tho many profeſs it out of Intereſt for many Ages paſt, rather than out of Perſwaſion, no ſuch thing can be ſuſpected concerning its firſt Founders: That the Diviſions which are among Chriſtians ought not to make one doubt of the Truth of it: That the Goſpel is very uſeful to the greateſt part of Mankind, both in this Life and the next: That the Falſities which are to be found in the Doctrine of ſome Chriſtians now, muſt not be aſcrib'd to the Apoſtles. Laſtly, That the Hiſtory of the Creation of the World, and of God's Revelation to Men, ſuch as the Chriſtians repreſent it, contains nothing but what is moſt agreeable to Reaſon, and moſt worthy of the Wiſdom of the Maker of Heaven and Earth.

If Unbelievers would seriously think upon what I have said concerning those Propositions, I am perswaded that they would easily grant them; and then they might find, without any difficulty, an Answer to all their particular Objections. As soon as some undeniable Principles have been laid down, which influence all the Parts of the Christian Theology, several things, which before seem'd difficult, cease then to be so; and thus one's Knowledg may be encreas'd every day. On the contrary, the general Principles of Religion remaining uncertain or unknown, every thing makes Men perplex'd, and the longer they live in such a State, the more the Difficulties encrease. As soon as Men have learn'd to distinguish the Religion of Christ and his Apostles from what is taught in several Parts of *Europe*, and the Maxims of the first Founders of Christianity, from those of many Christians of this time; they may easily perceive that a great Part of the Doctrines which they were offended at, and the Behaviour which they dislike, are not at all like the Doctrine of antient Christianity, or the Manners of the Primitive Christians.

The thing we treat of is not a Dispute, wherein Men only design to shew their Wit, and get the Victory, but the Question is about the Search of a Truth, the Know-

Knowledg whereof is equally uſeful to both Sides: Unbelievers ought therefore to part altogether with that Spirit of Wrangling, which makes them ſo eager to find fault, as if they were ſorry to be convinc'd that the Chriſtian Religion contains nothing that claſhes with right Reaſon. On the contrary, they ſhould be diſpos'd as thoſe who ſearch a Truth neceſſary to them, and think rather to diſcover it themſelves, than to find ſome Falſities in the Doctrine of thoſe who would lead them to it, and to whom it is not perhaps well known. If thoſe to whom they make their Application to reſolve their Doubts, do not ſatisfy them, they ought to apply themſelves to the Divines, or read the Writings of another Party, which perhaps will afford them greater Satisfaction. Nay, if no body did altogether ſatisfy them, they would not be leſs bound to ſeek the Truth; and having known it in part, they ſhould endeavour to go farther, if it were poſſible, and take care not to part with what ſeem'd to them certain, becauſe they are not convinc'd of the reſt.

This common Senſe would require from Unbelievers, if Chriſtianity was now in ſo deplorable a Condition, that of all the Sects whereof it is made up, none knew it in its whole Extent, or could defend it as they ought. But Thanks be to God

we are not reduc'd to that Extremity. The Method of Reaſoning about Religion, as about all other things, and the manner of explaining the Holy Scripture, were brought in the laſt Century, and in this, by ſome Chriſtians, to ſuch a degree of Perfection, as they never attain'd to before. Thoſe who liv'd in the firſt Ages of Chriſtianity had reaſon to thank God for ſhewing them clear and living Proofs of the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion by the Miracles that were wrought in the ſight of all Men, and the exact Knowledg they had of the Hiſtory of its firſt Founders. If we have not the ſame Advantages, we have at leaſt reaſon to give him our Thanks for teaching us that tho the Chriſtian Religion was founded without much Reaſoning or Eloquence, for the Reaſons I have alledg'd, yet the more we are able to reaſon well, the better we may be convinc'd of it; and that the Art of Writing according to the Rules grounded on Reaſon, may be of great Uſe to ſet all the Beauties of the Chriſtian Religion in their due Light. The Suſpicions which thoſe Talents might have rais'd concerning its firſt Founders, have no room left with reſpect to thoſe who write now. There can be no better Service done to Religion than by enquiring into its Proofs with all the Exactneſs that we are capable of, and ſetting before the Eyes

Eyes of the Reader what has been discover'd, with all the Ornaments of true Eloquence. Those who know the History of past Ages, are not ignorant that in many of them false Reasonings and great Ignorance were the best Talents of the Interpreters of Religion; so that a Man who read them, was almost to part with Reason and common Sense. God be thank'd we are no more in such a Darkness! May he encrease more and more the Light we enjoy by his Grace!

FINIS.

Two

Two LETTERS *concerning the Truth of the Christian Religion.*

ADVERTISEMENT.

WHEN I began the foregoing Discourse, I thought it not necessary to add any direct *Proofs of the Truth of the Christian Religion: But, as I went on, I perceiv'd that this Work would not be compleat enough, if I prov'd it not at least in few Words. What I have said concerning Incredulity, being design'd only to remove the general Obstacles which hinder the Incredulous from believing it to be true, it would seem that I was contented to make part of that Way smooth which may lead them to Heaven, without caring to guide them to the End of it. Therefore I thought my self oblig'd to add these two Letters, one of which was publish'd about ten Years ago, but it will be found here larger, more correct, and in a better Order than it was before. As for the other, 'tis almost but an Extract, by way of a Letter, of a Chapter of*

a

Latin Book, wherein I have treated of the Nature of Spirits, which was made publick above these three Years.

LETTER I.

Wherein is prov'd the Sincerity of the Apostles in the Testimony they bore to the Resurrection of Christ.

1. SIR, You desire that I prove to you in few Words the Truth of the Christian Religion, that you may use my Proofs to cure some Gentlemen of your Acquaintance, who are fall'n into Infidelity. I could refer you to others who have successfully treated of that Matter, but because most of them have enlarg'd very much upon it, I'll endeavour to tell you more briefly what I think proper to convince your Friends of the Truth of Christianity.

The most common Reproach Unbelievers cast upon us, is, that we are full of Prejudices, which hinder us from undeceiving our selves. We say the same thing of them, and we affirm that 'tis commonly their ill Disposition which raises some Difficulties in their Minds, which otherwise they would not so much

as

as think of. Besides, we upbraid them with supposing a thousand uncertain things in their Reasonings, as if they were certain; and they fail not in their turn to accuse us of the same Fault. 'Tis not just that either of us should suppose our Prejudices as Principles that are either demonstrated, or that want no Demonstration. Let us therefore act on both sides, as if we had embrac'd no Party, and let us say nothing but what is grounded upon some Principles granted on both sides.

2. 'Tis granted on all hands, that there are certain Characters whereby we may often know whether a Fact be true or not, and distinguish a false History from a true one. If this was not granted, Men must be *Scepticks*, or rather mad Men; for one can't, without being stark mad, doubt of the Truth of all Histories. But another thing must be also granted, which is not less certain, *viz.* that to know the Truth or Falsity of a Fact, several Circumstances of Things, Time, Places and Persons, must be present to the Mind, without which one can't judg solidly of that Fact, and by which one may most certainly determin whether it be true or false. Those who know those Circumstances, and have examin'd them at their leisure, may certainly give their Judgment about the Facts in question; but they can't convince others,

others, without having instructed them before, and convinc'd them of the same Circumstances: For example, those who have read the Roman History cannot doubt whether there was a *Julius Cesar*, who made himself Master of the Commonwealth, because the Multitude of contemporary Historians, and of the following Ages, who attest the same thing, the *Series* of the Time and History, Inscriptions, Medals, and the Air of Sincerity which is to be perceiv'd in all those things, do not allow them to doubt of it. But if a Man was ignorant of all these Reasons which we have to believe the Facts I have mention'd, and would doubt of them, it would be impossible to free him from his Doubt, without instructing him in all those Circumstances.

The Divinity of the Christian Religion being establish'd upon some Facts, one can't judg of it neither but by the Knowledg of the Circumstances which attend them. Wherefore those who desire it should be prov'd to them, without acquainting them with those Circumstances, require a thing equally unjust and impossible. What I have said concerning *Julius Cesar* can't be prov'd to a Man altogether ignorant of the Roman History, whilst he remains in that Ignorance; and consequently 'twould be unjust to require any such thing with respect to Religion.

3. The

3. The first thing therefore that ought to be done, to prove the Truth of the Christian Religion, is to set down the Facts it supposes, with all their Circumstances: but an Objection offers it self, which must be resolv'd before. They ask what are the Doctrines of that Religion, for the Christians have great Controversies among themselves about their Belief. But our business is not to prove the private Opinions of any Party of Christianity. 'Tis enough to shew, that the Doctrines about which all Christians agree are true, by proving the Truth of some Facts, about which they agree too. Those who are sure of the Truth of its Doctrines and Facts, may, if they will, afterwards examin all the Controversies they please.

Therefore without undertaking to decide those Matters, I begin with the Examination of the Gospel-Morals, * without coming to any Particulars. It can't be deni'd, that if all Men liv'd according to its Precepts, and by reason of the Rewards and Punishments of another Life were careful to worship the Creator of the World; to live with Modesty, Temperance, Sobriety and Patience; and to deal with their Neighbours as they would be dealt by them; it can't be deni'd, I say, that such a Life would be most pleasant and advantageous to human Society. We should not see a thousand impious Extravagancies,

* *See an Abridgment of them in* ch. 1. *of* Part 1.

vagancies, and so many Superstitions, which have very dismal Consequences, as we see among Idolatrous Nations. The excessive Love of Dignities, Riches and Pleasures, would not be the Cause of any Disorder, and would be attended with no publick or private Sorrows. Men should not know what it was to wrong their Neighbours, or suffer any Trouble, because of others Inhumanity or Malice. They would help one another in all their Needs, with all the Ardour and Eagerness that can be wish'd for. If they should happen to give one another any Trouble, without any premeditated Design, they would forgive one another, and make amends for it by all sorts of good Services. Lastly, the Mind enjoying a perfect Tranquillity, and the Body being as healthful as its natural Weakness can allow, and both enjoying the harmless Pleasures which the Gospel allows us, Men would not part with so pleasant a Life, but to enjoy another that would be free for ever from the unavoidable Inconveniencies to which Nature has made those liable who live upon Earth.

Such as have any Notion of the Morals of Christ, will necessarily grant this Truth, *viz.* that Men would be most happy if they observ'd them all alike. It will perhaps be ask'd, whether any Christian Society does it? But that is not a pro-

proper Question; 'tis enough if it be granted that a Doctrine which can work so admirable Effects, must needs make one entertain favourable Thoughts of those who preach'd it at first. We can't forbear admiring those who first exhorted Men to live one with another after a manner so agreeable to Reason, so advantageous to Society, and so pleasant and charming, that nothing can be preferr'd to it but the supreme Happiness, which can't be enjoy'd but in an endless Life.

4. To know when that Doctrine was brought into the World, and by whom, we need only examin from Age to Age the Authors who spoke of it, by ascending from ours to that wherein Christianity began first to be known. We shall learn from thence, or from the reading of some History, that above thirteen hundred Years past the Roman Emperors having embrac'd the Christian Religion, it flourish'd in a great part of *Europe*, *Asia*, and *Africa*. We may be convinc'd by a great number of Christian Authors, that from that time they profess'd to believe the Divinity of the Gospel-Morals. If we go higher still, we shall find by the reading of Heathen and Christian Authors, that there was already a great multitude of Christians under those Emperors, who taught the same Doctrine. All those who spake of the Origin of Christianity grant it

it began under the Empire of *Tiberius*, and that it was not heard of before. *Tacitus* who was born towards the end of the Empire of *Claudius*, or in the beginning of *Nero*'s, says that *Nero* having set on fire several Parts of *Rome*, charg'd the Christians with it, and put them to horrible Torments. He takes occasion from thence to speak of the Origin of Christianity in these Words: * *The Author of that Sect is* Christ, *who was put to Death under the Empire of* Tiberius *by* Pontius Pilate, *Governour of* Judea. *That pernicious Superstition, tho suppress'd in the beginning, quickly broke out again, and spread it self not only throughout* Judea, *the Place where this Evil had its Origin, but also in* Rome, *whither every villanous and shameful thing resorts, and finds Abettors. Those who confess'd that* they were Christians, *were presently seiz'd, and then a great multitude of People, whom they discover'd, but were not convicted of being Incendiaries, so much as they were run down by the Hatred that all Men bore against them.* It appears from hence that *Tacitus*, tho a Man of Sense, was not at the pains to know what Christianity was, of which he speaks after a most absurd manner. 'Tis a shameful Effect of his Negligence, as I have observ'd elsewhere, and perhaps of the Roman Vanity, which despis'd every thing, except the Learning of the *Grecians*. But two things may be observ'd in

* Annal. lib. 15. c. 44.

thoſe Words: One is the Truth of the Fact, which the Evangeliſts teach us, that there was one *Jeſus* in the Time of *Tiberius*, who was look'd upon as the *Chriſt* or *Meſſiah*, whom *Pontius Pilate* put to Death: The other is, that the Chriſtians were not found guilty of the Fire of *Rome*, and could not be put to Death, as *Tacitus* believes, but upon that Accuſation which concern'd alſo the Jews, *viz. That they were Enemies to Mankind.* The Interpreters of † *Tacitus* have ſhew'd that that Hiſtorian confounded the Jews with the Chriſtians. As it was but too true that the Jews were Enemies to other Men, ſo nothing can be more abſurd than to accuſe the Chriſtians of it, who had drawn on themſelves the Hatred of the Jews, by maintaining that all Men are Brethren, and freely converſing with all Nations.

† *See* Lipſius *upon this Place.*

We have alſo the Teſtimony of another contemporary Author, and a Friend of *Tacitus*, but who was ſomewhat more careful to know the Opinions of the Chriſtians. 'Tis ‖ *Pliny* the younger, who being Proconſul of *Bithynia*, about ſeventy Years after *Pontius Pilate* was Governour of *Judea*, ſearch'd out, by *Trajan*'s Orders, the Chriſtians who were in his Province, and would know what Opinions they had. Afterwards he wrote to *Trajan* about it, in a Letter, which is extant ſtill: *They affirm'd*, ſays he, *that all their Crime*

‖ Ep. lib. 10. Ep. 97.

Crime and Error conſiſted in their uſing to meet at Night, on a certain day, and ſing together a Hymn to CHRIST *as to a* GOD; *that they bound themſelves by an Oath indeed not to perpetrate any Crime, but to commit no Theft, nor Robbery, nor Adultery, to deceive no body, to deny no Truſt: afterwards they went to eat together, which they did in common, without any harm; but that they had left off doing it after my Edict, whereby, according to your Orders, I had forbidden all ſorts of Fraternities. Wherefore I thought it was neceſſary to extort the Truth by Torments from two Maids who were ſaid to be Deaconeſſes: But I have only found a ſtrange and exceſſive Superſtition.* *Pliny* as well as *Tacitus* calls *Superſtition* ſome Opinions contrary to thoſe of the Romans, according to the Cuſtom of that time.

Two ſuch Witneſſes can't be rejected, who certainly favour'd not the Chriſtians, and the firſt whereof acknowledges ſome Facts that were known to every body: and the other relates what he knew from two Chriſtian Women whom he put to the Rack. The Writings we have of the Chriſtians who liv'd from the time of *Pontius Pilate* to *Trajan*'s, tell us alſo the ſame things. They refer the beginning of Chriſtianity to that CHRIST whom *Pilate* put to Death; and they ſay, that they had preciſely the ſame Morals. This we ſee not only in the Writings of the Apo-

ſtles and Evangeliſts, but alſo in the Letter of St. *Barnabas*, in that of St. *Clemens*, in the Books of *Hermas*, and the genuine Epiſtles of St. *Ignatius* and St. *Polycarp*.

5. It muſt therefore be granted, that under the Empire of *Tiberius* there was a Man in *Judea* who gave a beginning to the Chriſtian Religion, and preach'd moſt excellent Morals. All the Chriſtians who liv'd ſince atteſt it from Age to Age, and no body did ever doubt of it; the Heathens themſelves don't deny it.

To be certain whether the Apoſtles and other Primitive Chriſtians were ſincere Perſons, or whether there was any Reaſon to ſuſpect their Honeſty, let us ſee what ſort of Men they were. Let us examin the Letter which St. *Clemens*, Biſhop of the Church of *Rome*, wrote to that of *Corinth* about forty Years after the Death of Chriſt, or in the beginning of the Empire of *Veſpaſian*. We ſee in that whole Epiſtle a Spirit of Peace, Charity, Humility, and very preſſing Exhortations to obey the Morals of the Goſpel. He ſeverely chides thoſe who obſerve them not, and praiſes the *Corinthians* for having conform'd their Actions to its Precepts during ſome time. One may ſee the beginning of his Epiſtle, wherein he bears witneſs * to the Chriſtians of *Corinth*; *That they had labour'd Day and Night for all the Brethren, that the number of the Elect of God might be preſerv'd with Mercy*

* 5. 2.

Mercy and Conscience; that they had been sincere, without Malice, and without remembring the Harm they might have done one to another; that all Divisions and Schisms were abhorr'd by them; that they were sorrowful for the Faults of their Neighbours; that they look'd upon their Wants as their own; that they never repented of having done well, but were always ready to do all manner of good Works; that in their Conduct full of Vertue and worthy of Respect, they did every thing in the Fear of God, whose Commands were written in their Hearts. Nay, he says towards the end, *that he knew many Christians who put themselves in Chains to redeem others; and that many having sold themselves to be Slaves, had fed others with the Price of their own Liberty.* His whole Letter is full of the like Expressions.

That *Clemens* had for his Masters the Apostles of *JESUS OF NAZARETH*, who first taught Christianity, and he bears them witness of a great Piety. If we read their Writings, we shall find nothing in them but what breathes a great Respect for the Deity, an extreme Love to all Men, and an extraordinary Modesty in whatever relates to a Man's Behaviour towards himself. Let any of these Writings be pitch'd upon, nothing will be found in it but what tends to Piety and Charity. If some of their Writings have been controverted, let us take those that were never

doubted of; or, if you pleaſe, thoſe which were quoted by St. *Clemens*, St. *Luke*'s Goſpel, and the firſt Epiſtle of St. *Paul* to the *Corinthians*; and we ſhall find in them the ſame Morals, which they endeavour to infuſe into the Minds of their Diſciples.

6. The Apoſtles therefore, by exhorting all thoſe that would hear them, to live after a manner ſo rational and ſo advantageous to human Society, could not be ſuſpected thereby of want of Sincerity. But it will perhaps be ſaid, that they preach'd that Doctrine only to inſinuate themſelves into the Minds of the People; and then under pretence of Piety to obtain from them what they deſir'd. But it muſt be granted me, that this is a mere Suſpicion, not at all grounded upon the Doctrine they taught, ſeeing they condemn alike the unlawful Love of Riches, Dignities and Pleaſures, and all ſorts of Fraud and Cheat. Not one Place of their Writings can be quoted that favours Ambition, Covetouſneſs, or Voluptuouſneſs.

This being ſo, that Suſpicion can be grounded but upon one of theſe two things, *viz.* either that the Apoſtles could expect ſome Advantage by their Doctrine, if it were generally embrac'd, or that they actually got ſome by it, as ſoon as they began to preach it. I call *Advantage* a Good greater in it ſelf than all the Toils and

and Dangers which the Apostles expos'd themselves to by preaching the Gospel, or at least which they thought to be greater. 'Tis not likely, that if they were Deceivers, they would not propose to themselves a greater Advantage than the Trouble they were at. Otherwise we should look upon them as mad Men, which can't be suppos'd without Extravagancy, by those who have read their Writings.

But the Apostles could not expect any Advantage from their Doctrine, but on supposition that most of those to whom they preach'd it would embrace it. Otherwise they could expect but a perpetual Persecution; for none but a mad Man would have expected to live quietly among Men extremely conceited of some Opinions contrary to those he professes, who think themselves oblig'd both for the Good of the State, and the Interest of their Religion, to take away the Estates and Lives of those who oppose their Superstitions, such as were generally the *Romans*, *Grecians* and *Jews*, in the time of the Apostles.

They expected then that their Preaching would be so successful as to work upon the greatest part of Mankind? But this they could not expect, if they were never so little acquainted with the State wherein those Nations subject to the Roman Empire then were. The Jews were

so addicted to their Traditions and Ceremonies, and besides so * corrupt in their Manners, that there was no likelihood of freeing them from their Prejudices and Vices. The Romans and Grecians were either Atheists or superstitious; and generally so given to their Pleasures, so covetous and ambitious, that the small number of those who had not lost all Sense ‖ of Vertue, speak with Horror and Detestation of the Manners of their Time. The History of both represents to us, in the Events of that time, an Image of the most horrible Corruption that ever was, if we judg of it according to the Gospel-Notions. After what has been said, can any Man fancy that the Apostles hop'd to get their Opinions embrac'd by most of those who liv'd in their time? How could they expect that Men so blinded by their Passions, and hardn'd in their Crimes, would ever embrace Opinions that are altogether contrary to them? Indeed the Apostles openly said after their Master, that they expected not a great number of Men would receive their Doctrine, in proportion to those who should remain in their Unbelief.

* *See* Josephus *in the History of that time.*

‖ Vid. Sallust. in Bel. Catilin. Senecam Ep. 7. Quæst. Nat. lib. 4. Præfat. & passim Juvenal. Persium, &c.

But supposing the Apostles Simplicity had made them hope to convert the greatest Part of the Roman Empire, Experience would have soon undeceiv'd them, seeing after having preach'd during many

Years,

Years, they were oblig'd to acknowledg, that they had converted but few People. The Roman History plainly teaches us, that during three hundred Years after the Beginning of Christianity, the number of Christians was far less than that of Heathens in the Roman Empire. Thus the Apostles were necessarily expos'd to a cruel Persecution during their whole Life. Being despis'd and hated by the Jews and Heathens alike, they could have no Reward that might be compar'd with their Labours, and the Dangers they were in every Minute. Hence it is that they * themselves say they expected all sorts of Misery in this Life. They were not mistaken, seeing after an infinite number of Sufferings they were cruelly put to Death, maintaining still the Truth of the Doctrine they had preach'd. † *'Tis out of an unjust Envy*, says *Clemens*, whom I have cited already, *that* Peter *suffer'd not one or two, but several Pains; and having undergone Martyrdom, is gone into the Place of Glory, which was due to him. 'Tis out of Envy that* Paul *got the Price of Patience. Having been put seven times in Irons, whipt and ston'd; being the Herald of the Gospel in the* East *and* West, *he made his Faith famous. Having taught the whole World Justice, and being come to the Extremity of the West, when he had suffer'd Martyrdom before the Chief of the State, he went out of the World.*

* 1 Cor. 15. 19.

† 5. 5.

That

That Event of the Apoſtles Preaching deſtroys altogether the ſecond thing on which the Suſpicion of their want of Sincerity might have been grounded. If they were eſteem'd by a ſmall number of Men, * moſt of them of a low Condition, they were deſpis'd by the reſt of Men, Jews and Heathens; ill-treated and perſecuted, ſuffer'd an extreme Poverty, and at laſt died by the Hands of publick Executioners, as I have ſhew'd by *Clemens*'s Words, and as all their other Diſciples affirm it. One of the Apoſtles teaches us the ſame thing, when he ſays in one of his Epiſtles; † *Unto this preſent Hour, we both hunger and thirſt, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain Dwelling-place: and labour, working with our own Hands.* ‖ *If in this Life only we have Hope, we are of all Men moſt miſerable.*

* *See* 1 Cor. 1. 26.

† 1 Cor. 4. 11.

‖ Ib. c. 15. 19.

Certainly no Man of Senſe would become the Execration of moſt Men, by maintaining a Forgery, to be eſteem'd by ſome few who have no Credit or Reputation, nor would he be † *dealt with as thoſe that were appointed to Death* in the *Amphitheaters*, to be a Spectate to the People. A Man may be mov'd with the Deſire of Glory, when he conſiders that moſt of thoſe among whom he lives will applaud him; but no body ever thought fit to expoſe himſelf to Long-ſufferings, and at laſt to a cruel and ſhameful Death, only to

† Ib. c. 4. 9.

to be esteem'd by very few Men, and be look'd upon as an impious or mad Man by the greatest part of those among whom he liv'd.

7. The Truth of those Facts can't be deni'd, *viz.* that the Apostles have preach'd the Doctrine we read in their Books (which Christians profess still) under the Empire of *Tiberius*, and some following Emperors; that they liv'd in Sorrows and Afflictions; and at last some of them were put to a cruel Death, maintaining the Doctrine they taught during many Years.

If we suspected that the Apostles liv'd after a voluptuous manner, and altogether contrary to the Morals they preach'd, we should doubt of the Testimony of their first Disciples, who in imitation of their Masters, as they themselves say, have courageously expos'd themselves to an infinite number of Sufferings, without getting any Advantage by it in this Life. * *To those Men*, says *Clemens*, speaking of St. *Peter* and St. *Paul*, *who liv'd after a divine manner, a great multitude of the Elect were join'd, who having undergone several Torments, were a most noble Example amongst us.* It would be one of the greatest Absurdities to say that the Apostles preaching that Men must suffer for Religion, exhorting them to the Practice of all manner of Vertues, and yet living at ease, with- * §. 6.

without caring to practiſe the Precepts they gave to others, but as far as it might ſerve to cheat the World, made a great number of Diſciples, not only ſincere Imitators of the ſeeming Vertues of their Maſters, but ready to die, and who really died for a Doctrine, for which thoſe of whom they learn'd it would ſuffer nothing.

One may eaſily conceive that ſome ſeduc'd Perſons may be as ſtrongly perſwaded of a Lie, as we are of the moſt evident Truths, and do conſequently, to maintain a Falſhood, whatever the moſt reſolute Men can do for the moſt important Truths. But one can't apprehend that Men who have imbib'd from their Childhood ſome Opinions altogether contrary to thoſe of the Apoſtles, ſuffer'd themſelves to be ſeduc'd; ſo that after they embrac'd their Doctrine, they ſuffer'd the moſt cruel Torments for it, tho they never ſaw their Maſters ſuffer any thing for it. But it appears from the Paſſage I have quoted out of *Tacitus*, that in the beginning of Chriſtianity a great many People declar'd themſelves Chriſtians, tho they ſaw that the publick Profeſſion of the Chriſtian Religion ſhould expoſe them to the Puniſhments inflicted upon Incendiaries. It appears alſo from *Pliny*, that ſome Chriſtian Women ſuffer'd to be put to the rack for their Chriſtianity,

ty, without accusing the Christians of any thing. From whence it necessarily follows, that some of the first Preachers of the Gospel gave an Example to others, as their Disciples affirm it. One can't apprehend otherwise how they could get their Doctrine receiv'd by so many People, who suffer'd horrible Torments for the Religion they learn'd of them.

From what has been said I only draw this Consequence, *viz.* that the Apostles were sincere Men, as well as those, who, following their Example, died for the same Doctrine. The Apostles having been therefore undeniably sincere Men, it must be further confess'd, that if there ever were any Men whose Vertue deserv'd our Esteem, they are they. One can't think of a Design more useful to Mankind than theirs, as I have shew'd already, speaking of the Morals they preach'd. No body could endeavour to make it succeed with greater Zeal and Ardour, than they who sacrific'd to it their Repose, Pleasures, Estates, hopes of raising themselves, Honour, and Life it self.

Now I ask, whether being convinc'd of the Probity and Sincerity of the Apostles, and knowing besides from their Discourses that they were far from being mad Men, we may justly refuse to believe their Testimony, when they affirm they have seen some Facts which they relate with a vast num-

number of Circumſtances, and heard ſome Diſcourſes which they ſet down from the beginning to the end, and which are full of Senſe? Let every one put the Queſtion to himſelf, whether he would not believe a Friend of his, whom he knew to be a ſincere and judicious Man, if he affirm'd he had heard and ſeen ſeveral things which he relates, without having any Intereſt to deceive him? Could he look upon the Teſtimony of a Man of Senſe, who ſhould give all imaginable Marks of Sincerity, as a Lie, if he affirm'd he had heard a Friend of his ſay ſomething, and afterwards had been preſent at his Torments and Death? I confeſs that thoſe who knew not his Sincerity and Judgment, and that he had no Intereſt to tell a Lie, might doubt of what they ſhould hear him ſay; but I affirm, that being perſwaded of his Honeſty and Wiſdom, it were impoſſible not to believe him. Every one may be convinc'd of it by his Experience, and may imagin a thouſand Examples of what I ſaid.

The Apoſtles tell us they liv'd ſome Years with JESUS of *Nazareth*, of whom they learn'd all their Doctrine; that they ſaw him crucifi'd on ſuch a day, giving up the Ghoſt upon the Croſs, and afterwards buri'd in a Sepulcher digg'd in a Rock by a Jewiſh Counſellor, whoſe Name was *Joſeph* of *Arimathea*, who obtain'd from

from *Pilate* leave to bury *Jesus*, and who having put him in a Sepulcher, caus'd a great Stone to be roll'd at the Entrance; that they saw some Roman Souldiers guard that Sepulcher, which the Chief of the Jews had seal'd, lest the Body of *Jesus* should be taken away. Can we, being perswaded, as we are, of the Sincerity of the Apostles, and having so strong Proofs of it, refuse to believe them in this? Certainly we should be out of our Wits, did we believe that wise and sincere Men would tell a Lie, when they affirm a Fact of that Nature with so many Circumstances. We cannot forbear having the same Thoughts concerning the Discourses of *Jesus*, which the same Apostles relate with so many Circumstances, that we could not relate them better, if we had heard them. 'Tis as clear as the Noon-light to those who are perswaded that the Apostles were Men who had at least common Sense and Honesty, that they said Truth concerning the Facts I have mention'd.

9. This being so, we can have no good Reason not to believe them when they affirm they have often seen their Master heal in a moment incurable Diseases, restore dead Men to Life, and himself rais'd at last, after he had been above thirty Hours in his Sepulchre, and then speaking and eating with them during many Days, and at last ascending to Heaven in

a

a Cloud, in their Preſence. I know that ſeveral Men, who perhaps had never doubted of the Truth of the Apoſtles Teſtimony, if they had ſaid nothing of the Miracles, Reſurrection and Aſcenſion of Chriſt, doubt of it only for that Reaſon. They could have eaſily believ'd that a Man nam'd JESUS taught the Morals we find in the Goſpel in *Judea*, when *Pontius Pilate* was Governour of it, and that the Jews oblig'd the Roman Governour to put him to Death out of Envy and Malice; and that his Diſciples went on after his Death and taught his Doctrine, and that the moſt cruel Torments could not hinder them from preaching it. They would praiſe the whole Doctrine of Chriſt as the moſt excellent Philoſophy that ever was taught among Men, and which contains the beſt Principles that can be thought of, to oblige them to live well one with another. But they perſwade themſelves, that the Apoſtles were Impoſtors, only becauſe they ſay they ſaw their Maſter work Miracles, that he was ſeen by them after their Reſurrection, and aſcended into Heaven in their ſight. Let's ſee why they do ſo.

The Falſity of a Hiſtory can be known but two ways. Firſt, when we perceive that the Witneſſes who relate it were deceiv'd themſelves, or deſign'd to deceive others, tho what they relate be very poſſible.

ble. Secondly, when we know by clear and evident Arguments that the Facts in question are absolutely impossible in themselves.

I have clearly shew'd that the Apostles design'd not to deceive others, and it can't be said that they themselves were always deceiv'd in all the Miracles they relate. If the Question was about a small number of Miracles, difficult to examin, one might have such a Suspicion with some likelihood; but they relate so many, and of so many sorts, that if what they say be not true, they must necessarily have been Deceivers. For example, they could not be impos'd upon by Christ's Ascension into Heaven, which they constantly preach'd, and of which the Christians made from the beginning one of the chief Articles of their Faith. Those who, as *Pliny* relates it, sung Hymns to *Christ* as to a God, believ'd without doubt that he ascended into Heaven. If we read only St. *Luke*'s * Gospel, and the first Epistle of St. *Paul* to the *Corinthians*, which contain several particular Circumstances of many Miracles of Christ, especially of his Resurrection, and his several Apparitions after he came out of his Grave, we may certainly know that those who spoke so, were not seduc'd; and that if what they say is not true, they must necessarily have design'd to deceive those to whom they re-

* Luke 24. 1 Cor. 15.

lated ſuch Facts. But I have undeniably ſhew'd, that the Apoſtles were ſincere Men, and conſequently that their Teſtimony can't be rejected.

Wherefore thoſe who believe it not, accuſe them not of having ſuffer'd themſelves to be ſeduc'd, neither do they undertake to overthrow the Arguments by which we prove the Apoſtles Sincerity. They are contented to offer ſome Objections concerning the Nature of Miracles, and ſo confine themſelves to the ſecond way of knowing the Falſity of a Fact, which conſiſts in diſcovering that 'tis a thing abſolutely impoſſible.

But I ſhall ſpeak of this in another Letter, wherein I ſhall explain the Nature of Miracles. I am,

SIR,

Yours.

LET-

LETTER II.

Wherein is shew'd what a Miracle is, and that we ought to conclude from those of Christ and his Apostles, that they were truly sent of God.

1. SIR, I promis'd you to discourse of the Nature of Miracles, and I must perform my Promise, seeing without it I should but half prove the Truth of the Christian Religion. 'Tis not enough to believe that the general Doctrines of Christianity are true and agreeable to Reason; we must be also perswaded that they are of Divine Revelation, and this we learn from the Miracles of those who first preach'd them. That is the *Seal* whereby we clearly discover the Truth of the Christian Religion. To shew that it was reveal'd by the same God who made Heaven and Earth, and gave to Nature the Laws, according to which natural Causes act; they have often desir'd him to suspend the Effects of those Laws, tho unavoidable; at their Prayers they were suspended, and the contrary of what the Experience of all

Ages had obſerv'd hitherto, and of what we ſtill ſee, happen'd then. That's an undeniable Proof, not only of their Doctrines being agreeable to the Will and Deſigns of the Maker of all Things, as it ſeems to be if it be merely conſider'd in it ſelf, but alſo of their having an expreſs Order from God to publiſh it among Men.

Wherefore I'll ſhew firſt, what a Miracle is, and how true Miracles may be diſtinguiſh'd from falſe ones. Secondly, I'll enquire into the Author of them, and what Conſequence may be drawn from them. Laſtly, I ſhall ſay ſomething concerning the Extent of Miracles, and their different kinds. I'll ſhew at the ſame time the Truth of the Miracles of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, and I ſhall anſwer ſome Objections of Unbelievers.

2. To look upon an extraordinary Effect as a Miracle, and draw any Conſequences from it; Firſt, it muſt be a thing above the Power of Men. Secondly, it ought to be above the ordinary Courſe of Nature, or corporeal Cauſes; and above the Strength of humane Souls; for *Nature*, or *natural Cauſes*, and the *Order* or *the Laws of Nature*, are nothing but the Souls and Bodies of Men, other Bodies, and the Laws according to which they conſtantly act, without being able to violate them. Thirdly, he in whoſe Behalf that

that thing is done, ought to know it before-hand, or at least it must happen when he wants it. I shall examin those three things one after another; for the whole Strength of the Proofs which can be fetch'd from Miracles depends upon it.

3. There are some Divines who maintain that a Miracle is only the Effect of an infinite Power, and consequently that God only is the Author of it; so that it is not only above the Power of Men, but also above that of all other Creatures. I shall speak of that hereafter. 'Tis enough to observe here, that nothing which Men are able to do, can be look'd upon as a miraculous thing. Wherefore to be sure whether what is vented as a Miracle is really so, the first thing that is to be consider'd, is, whether Men can do it. For if it appears that it is not above the Power of Men, there would be no reason to believe that it is an extraordinary Effect of God's Power, or of some other intelligent Being.

Thus if a Man shew'd an usual Skill in Swimming, and boasted of it as of a miraculous thing, he might be justly accounted an Impostor, because one may by Use get a Skill in Swimming, which seems wonderful to those who have it not. But if any body walk'd upon the Water as upon the Land, without sinking in the least, it could not be doubted that he did a thing

which is above all the Strength and Skill of Men, provided he had nothing under his Feet that might be ſeen, or elſewhere, to uphold him. Every one knows that there being a certain Relation of *Gravity* between humane Bodies and Water, the Laws of Nature allow not that a Man ſhould ſtand upon the Water. So that if it appears that any body walk'd upon the Water as upon the Land, without having under his Feet, or elſewhere, any thing to hold him ſo, it muſt be granted that a Power greater than that of Men acted in his behalf.

4. But becauſe there are an infinite number of natural Cauſes which Men make uſe of to produce ſome Effects, which they themſelves cannot produce by their mere Skill and Strength; a thing, to be look'd upon as miraculous, ought not to be done by any other natural Cauſe, ſuch as are the Bodies which ſurround us. For example, great Weights, which would preſently ſink if they were thrown into the Water, will lie upon it without ſinking, if a Body much lighter than Water, as Wood, be put between the Water and thoſe Weights. There is nothing miraculous in that, becauſe it is done by a corporeal and known Cauſe. But it could not be deni'd to be a miraculous thing, if a Man ſhould walk upon the Water as I have ſaid.

When

When a learned Physician cures a sick Person with some Remedies, after he has spent a long time in studying the Nature of Diseases, and the Effects of Remedies, that Cure is not look'd upon as a Miracle; 'tis ascrib'd to the natural Effect of the Remedies which have been well appli'd. But if we should see a Man, who only by touching all sorts of sick Persons, or by speaking to them, without using any sensible Remedy, cures them upon the spot, that Effect could be ascrib'd only to some supernatural Causes.

Some * Unbelievers have endeavour'd to make that Character of Miracles uncertain, by saying that we know not so perfectly natural Causes and their Effects, as to be able to distinguish what they can produce, from what is above their Strength. Nay, they pretend that what is call'd Miraculous should only be look'd upon as an extraordinary or rare Accident, and the Effect of natural Causes, which were not well known. But tho it be very true, that we are very far from having a perfect Knowledg of natural Causes, yet it is not less certain that we know most certainly some things by Experience, especially when that Experience is common and easy. For example, we perfectly know that no Man can stand upon the Water so as to touch it only with the Sole of his Feet, without using the

* Spinosa in Tract. Theologico-Polit. cap. 6.

help of any other Body for it. If any one ſhould ſay that it may be ſuch a thing happen'd ſometimes by an extraordinary Effect of ſome natural Cauſes which we know not; it is certain that ſuch a Conjecture could only be heard as a Propoſition which is not contradictory, but is not the leſs falſe for that, as the Experience of all Mankind teaches us. Indeed thoſe who uſe that Argument to make Miracles doubtful, do it only to perplex ſimple Men who hear them. They know very well that we are perfectly ſure of ſome things, and that they can't be made doubtful, by ſaying only that 'tis not contradictory that the contrary be true. If they durſt deny the miraculous Effects on which Religion is grounded, they would roundly do it, and not have recourſe to Objections ſo little judicious; but not daring to do it, and being not able to make the contrary of what we believe look probable, they confine themſelves to ſome ſuch Objections. I ſhall not undertake now to confute all their particular Objections, becauſe the Principles I lay down deſtroy them.

5. 'Tis therefore certain that we may know ſome things are above the Power of Men, and can't be the Effect of any other natural or corporeal Cauſe; and that if we ſee ſome happen, or learn from faithful Witneſſes that there happen'd ſome, we may

may say, without being mistaken, that they are miraculous things. Such is, for example, the Action of walking upon the Water, and curing all manner of Diseases without Remedies.

However, to draw any Consequences from a miraculous Fact in the behalf of any body, he ought to know before-hand that that Miracle will happen; or at least it must happen just when 'tis necessary, for otherwise it would be insignificant. If when no body thinks of it there happen'd a thing wherein neither Men nor other natural Causes had a hand, and no body knew of what use it would be, nothing could be concluded from it; and he who should say that it happen'd in his behalf, ought to be suspected of Fraud.

Some * Historians, for instance, tell us that *Alexander* going to meet *Darius*, led part of his Troops to pass at the foot of Mount *Climax*, where there was no Passage when the South Wind blew, because the Sea cover'd that way; and that as soon as he came thither the North blew, so that they went through it. Not to say the Change of Wind at that time might be natural, I affirm that *Alexander* having not known it before, and being able to go another way, it can't be look'd upon as a Miracle, which Providence wrought in his behalf; nor can it be concluded from it, that Heaven approv'd his Designs.

* *See my Dissertation* De Trajectu maris Idumæi.

To

To give another Example fetch'd from the Hiſtory of the ſame Prince, * 'tis ſaid that his Corps remain'd ſeven Days at *Babylon* before it was embalm'd, without ſmelling ill in the leaſt; nor had his Face a different Colour than what it had whilſt he was alive, tho it be extremely hot in that Climate wherein *Babylon* was ſituated. Let us ſuppoſe not only the Truth of that Fact, but alſo that natural Cauſes had no hand in it; 'tis manifeſt that nothing can be concluded from ſuch a thing either for or againſt *Alexander*. For indeed what could the inviſible Power mean by preſerving the Body of *Alexander* from Corruption during ſeven Days? None but that Power can teach it; and if any one had undertaken to make his advantage of it, he had been juſtly laugh'd at.

* Vid. Q. Curt. lib. 10. c. 10.

That Character of a true Miracle altogether deſtroys the Objection I have confuted already: for if miraculous Facts were extraordinary Effects of natural but unknown Cauſes, 'tis manifeſt they could not be foreſeen. No Man can foreſee a thing which ſcarce ever happens, and is the Effect of ſome Cauſes which are unknown to him, unleſs that Man be warn'd of it by an Effect of the ſame Cauſes, which is to ſuppoſe without reaſon a thing altogether incomprehenſible.

6. Wherefore if we can ſhew that there happen'd ſome things that neither Men nor

nor other natural Causes could do, which notwithstanding were foretold by those in whose behalf they were done; it must be granted us, that they are miraculous Facts which happen'd in the behalf of those who foretold them. The Gospels are full of the like Miracles, but I shall only pitch upon one, to apply what has been said to it. It is of so great moment, that if it be granted that 'tis true, the rest can't be deni'd. I mean *the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, wherein we see all the Characters of a true Miracle. First, 'tis certain by the Experience of all Ages, that no Man, or any other natural Cause, can restore a dead Man to Life. Tho the humane Body is not perfectly known to us, no more than the Virtue of an infinite number of things, yet we may affirm without Rashness, that no body raises himself, nor by his own Virtue, or that of any other thing. One can't affirm the contrary without being look'd upon as a mad Man among all the Nations in the World. Secondly, Jesus Christ * often foretold his Resurrection, and said it should happen on the third Day. He concluded from thence before-hand, that Men would be oblig'd to believe that he was sent by God, his Resurrection being the greatest *Sign* of it that could be ask'd.

* Mat. 16. 21. & 17. 23. & 26. 61. & 27. 63.

† *An evil and adulterous Generation*, said he, *seeks after a Sign, and there shall no Sign*

† Mat. 12. 39, 40.

Sign be given to it, but the Sign of the Prophet Jonas; *for as* Jonas *was three Days and three Nights in the Whale's Belly, ſo ſhall the Son of Man be three Days and three Nights in the Heart of the Earth.*

If the Apoſtles were ſincere Men, and were not deceiv'd, that Fact is undeniable, and conſequently it muſt be acknowledg'd that he who rais'd Jeſus Chriſt, bare him a Teſtimony which can't be doubted of. I have ſhew'd in the foregoing Letter, that the Apoſtles were ſincere Men, and could not be deceiv'd on that occaſion. Their Maſter was not hid in a Chamber when it was ſaid that he was dead; 'twas upon a Croſs, and in a publick Place, ſurrounded with Roman Souldiers. He had been buri'd, his Enemies ſeal'd his Sepulcher; they ſet a Guard of Souldiers about it, and he was above four and twenty Hours in it. Therefore no body could doubt of his being truly dead, and his Apoſtles did not queſtion it. Afterwards they ſaw him ſeveral times, touch'd him, ſpoke with him, and ate with him; ſo that they could not be miſtaken in it. Wherefore if the thing had not happen'd, it were not poſſible to vindicate their Sincerity; and if they were ſincere Men, which they certainly were, as has been ſhew'd, the Truth of the Fact cannot be doubted of.

7. The

7. The more we examin their Testimony, the more we shall be convinc'd of it; and without insisting longer upon that, I had rather observe, against those who acknowledg a God and a Providence, that what may be said of feign'd Miracles can't be objected against that Miracle and other Miracles of Christ, *viz.* that there is no great likelihood that God would disturb the Order of Nature for so inconsiderable Matters as those are for which he is said to disturb it every day. The Unbelievers who liv'd in the Apostles time, and had not attentively consider'd the Circumstances which attend the preaching of the Gospel, might perhaps have said then that they apprehended not how Providence was so much concern'd in the Establishment of Christianity, as to work an infinite number of Miracles in its behalf, seeing it made so little a Progress in the World. But those who live now can't raise the like Objections against us, having seen the Duration and Progress of the Christian Religion. If it has not produc'd yet among Men all the Effects it should have produc'd, if they had known their true Interest, it can't be said that such a thing will never happen hereafter. Those who would have conjectur'd at the beginning of Christianity, that it should always be a contemptible Sect, because it was then despis'd, would have been grosly mistaken,

miſtaken, as we ſee at preſent; and the Knowledg we have of the Time paſt ought to make us reſerv'd with reſpect to the future.

8. Let us ſee now what is the efficient and immediate Cauſe of Miracles. We have ſeen already, that they are neither Men, nor other Bodies, which act according to the Order of Nature. It muſt be therefore ſome inviſible Power, that is, either ſome intelligent Beings more excellent than we, tho they are created, or elſe God himſelf.

Some believe, as I ſaid already, that Miracles are the Effects of an infinite Power; and there is no doubt but God himſelf wrought ſeveral Miracles: but the Queſtion is, whether they are all above the Strength of all other Creatures; ſo that they have no other efficient and immediate Cauſe but God himſelf. To deny that intelligent Beings, more perfect than we are, can work Miracles, we ſhould exactly know what is the Extent of their Power, and diſtinctly ſee that Miracles are above it. 'Tis true we know they are above the Laws of Nature, which God eſtabliſh'd from the beginning; but we know not whether he gives not to Angels the Power of altering ſometimes that Order. Tho it be originally the Effect of an infinite Power, it follows not that none but an infinite Power can make ſome Alteration

teration in it, if the Power which eſtabliſh'd it will permit it. We can't therefore ſay that Angels work no Miracles; in effect it appears from ſacred Hiſtory that God often made uſe of them when Miracles were wrought. But I will not inſiſt upon it, becauſe it belongs not to my Subject.

9. It will perhaps be ask'd, ſuppoſing Angels work Miracles; Firſt, how one may know whether 'tis God or an Angel that wrought a certain Miracle. And, Secondly, how one may know that a Miracle was done by a good or bad Angel.

A Miracle being not of a Nature which neceſſarily requires a Cauſe, whereof the Power is infinite, I confeſs we ſee no Character in it, if it be conſider'd in it ſelf, whereby we may know whether it was wrought by God or an Angel. But the more we ſee a thing above our Power, the more it ſeems difficult to us, and the more we perſwade our ſelves that 'tis the Effect of an infinite Power. For example, to foretel a contingent Event, or depending upon Mens Will, and which is to happen many Ages after, ſeems to us to be a thing above the Knowledg of created intelligent Beings, tho it be never ſo great. But the raiſing of a Storm, tho the Air is not diſpos'd for it, ſeems not to be a very difficult thing, tho it be above our Power; and we eaſily believe that Angels

Angels either good or bad can do it. However it matters little to know whether God immediately wrought a Miracle, or a good Angel, seeing 'tis certain good Angels do nothing but what is agreeable to the Will of God, or is an execution of his Orders. Whether God himself acts, or an Angel, 'tis the same thing with respect to us, seeing we neither see the Cause that works, nor the manner of its Operation.

As for the other Question concerning the manner of knowing whether a Miracle was wrought by a good or a bad Angel, one may say something more positive. Truth being always the same contradicts not it self; 'tis a manifest Principle to all those who are not *Pyrrhonians*. Wherefore the Miracles of God and good Angels ought always to tend to the confirming or establishing some Doctrines agreeable to Truths, that are known either by Revelation or Reason, seeing 'tis certain that God and good Angels always love the Truth. If we see therefore that a Miracle confirms or establishes something contrary to a certain Truth, we may be sure that Miracle is an Effect of a Power contrary to that of God and good Angels. Thus the Design of a Miracle discovers its Author. If we can't apprehend what's the end of a Miracle, we can give no certain Judgment about it, nor draw

draw from it any Consequence for or against Truth.

A bad Angel being not able to work Miracles which favour Truth and Vertue, all those which contribute to it, ought to be look'd upon as coming from a good Principle. On the contrary, a good Angel being not able to act for Lies and Vices, all the Miracles which should favour either of them, ought to be look'd upon as Miracles of bad Angels. This is an infallible Rule to know by what sort of Angels a Miracle was wrought, supposing it were known that an Angel was the Author of it.

10. If the Miracles of the Gospel are examin'd according to those Principles, it cannot be deni'd that they were wrought either by God himself or good Angels, because their only Aim is to establish or settle Truth, and lead Men to Vertue. Now this is altogether inconsistent with the Notion one may form of a Power which delights in doing ill, and deceiving Men. This Christ shew'd to the Pharisees, who accus'd him of casting out Devils, by virtue of a Power he had receiv'd from the Prince of Demons. * *Every Kingdom, says he, divided against it self, is brought to Desolation; and every City or House divided against it self, shall not stand: and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his* * Mat. 12. 25, 26.

Kingdom ſtand? That's a convincing Proof of the Divinity of the Miracles of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, againſt the Jews, who were ſo extravagant as to aſcribe them to an ill Power, that was an Enemy to Vertue. But becauſe I write not againſt them, I ſhall not longer inſiſt upon it. The Unbelievers who live among Chriſtians are not more perſwaded of the Power of the Devil, than of God, and deny all ſorts of Miracles alike. But I have ſhew'd, from the Sincerity of the Apoſtles, and the thing it ſelf, that they have no reaſon to deny thoſe of Chriſt.

11. Laſtly; If it be conſider'd that Miracles are the Effects of the Power of God or Angels, one may eaſily apprehend that they are not contradictory things. That which is *contradictory* is the Object of no Power, 'tis a mere Nothing, as all thoſe who know the Meaning of that word will grant it. No poſitive Idea can be form'd of it, and every contradictory Propoſition is unintelligible in it ſelf. If the Miracles mention'd in Holy Scripture are examin'd, not one of that Nature will be found among them. There is none but what may be expreſs'd in intelligible Propoſitions. For example, God can make a Man who liv'd to live no longer; that is, his Blood ſhall no more circulate, and all his Members ſhall ceaſe to perform their Functions. On the contrary, he can

can make a Man whose Blood was settl'd, and whose Members perform'd none of their Functions, to begin to live again, as it did before. Those Propositions are easily apprehended. But *to make a Man to live and not to live, at the same time*, taking the word *to live* in one and the same Sense, is a contradictory thing, which is not the Object of the Divine Power. God never wrought any such Miracles.

Those who rank among the Miracles of Christianity, that whereby they pretend that God makes a humane Body to be extended, and not extended at the same time, and to be in many Places at one time; those Men, I say, feign a Miracle, of which they have no Idea, and rest contented with Words they understand not. They ascribe to the Christian Religion a Mystery absurd, and contrary to the clearest Light of Reason and Revelation.

What I said concerning Miracles has no relation with that, and I pretend not to defend any such thing. My Design was to shew wherein Miracles consist, to make Unbelievers apprehend that they are very possible, that they can't be assaulted but by shewing that there is an Impossibility in the miraculous Facts on which the Christian Religion is grounded.

There is besides another sort of Miracles, which tho perhaps they happen every day, can't be of any use to prove the

Truth of the Christian Religion, because they are not sensible. God can very often do, either by himself or the Ministry of Angels, an infinite Number of things without the intervention of natural Causes, when he thinks fit, or good Men pray him to do it. But because one can't perceive whether a supernatural Cause acts or not on those occasions, because what happens is not in it self above the Strength of natural Causes, and 'tis not known whether they interven'd, it can't be affirm'd that a Miracle was wrought. For example, a sick Man whom Remedies could not naturally cure, is restor'd by the Prayers of his Relations, because God or Angels supply what is wanting in the natural Virtue of Remedies. But this can't be affirm'd without a Revelation.

Hereupon 'tis ask'd, How we come to suppose that God who works no more sensible Miracles, according to us, performs every day some invisible ones, such as that which I have describ'd; and why he should be desir'd to work this kind of Miracles, not those which strike our Senses? In answer to that I say, that we can know nothing of God's Conduct but by sensible Effects, or a Revelation. Wherefore seeing we see no more such Miracles as strike our Senses, we ought to say that God will work no more any such Miracles; and if we can give some Reasons of it, which are

not

not unworthy of God's Wisdom, nothing can hinder us from alledging them, * as I have done elsewhere. On the other hand, Revelation commanding us to offer Prayers to God in our Necessities, and assuring us that if what we ask is truly advantageous to us, if we ask it as we ought, and if we obey the Precepts of the Gospel, we shall obtain what we pray for; we have reason to suppose that God will interpose after an extraordinary manner, if it be necessary, to hear our Prayers, because he promis'd it. But why, will it be said, did God make such Promises, which suppose that he works still some Miracles of this latter sort, seeing he will no more do sensible ones? I have shew'd already, why he works no more Miracles, that fall under our Senses, and there is no need I should repeat what I have said about it. As for the other, they are a necessary Consequence of God's Providence, which consists not only in having given some Laws to Nature, according to which it acts; but in supplying the Defects of those Laws, and making such Exceptions to them as God thinks fit. Seeing therefore Providence exists not less now than it did formerly, no body ought to wonder that God works Miracles of that kind. There is nothing in it that's unworthy of him; and seeing he promis'd it, it can't be doubted whether he does it, and Men have

* Part II. ch. 6.

have reaſon to pray to him on that Supposition. It can't be ſaid that 'tis an impoſſible thing, and prov'd thereby that our Prayers are uſeleſs.

I think I have undeniably ſhew'd it, by ſuppoſing that there is a God who made the World, and is conſequently the Author of the Laws of Nature; and that there are ſome other intelligent Beings, who can do what is above the Power of Men. I prov'd the firſt thing in the laſt Chapter of the 2*d* Part of my Diſcourſe concerning *Incredulity*; and the other can't be doubted of, if we acknowledg the Authority of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, confirm'd with undeniable Miracles.

Chriſt and his Apoſtles might have made their Doctrine to be admir'd with mere Reaſonings, as we do now; but their Buſineſs was not only to ſhew that they ſaid nothing but what was moſt agreeable to Reaſon; they taught not their Doctrine as mere Philoſophers or Divines, but as Men authoriz'd by Heaven; they were therefore to convince Men that they were ſent from God. To prove it undeniably, there was no better way than to do ſome things above the Laws of Nature, which were ſenſible Signs of God's approving their Doctrine, and whereby they undeniably prov'd that they were his Meſſengers. If they had done or ſaid nothing but what other Men might have done or ſaid,

said, they would have been look'd upon as Divines or Philosophers, who vented their own Thoughts; but when Men saw that after they had appeal'd to the Maker of the World for the Truth of what they said, that there happen'd at their Prayers some things which are above the Power of all Men and all natural Causes; they could not doubt but God declar'd himself in their behalf, especially if they consider'd that the Doctrine they preach'd was most worthy of him. So that the finest Doctrine that ever was, attended with unheard-of Miracles, ought to excite the Attention of all those who were not altogether blinded by their Vices and Prejudices, and make them look upon them as the true Ministers of that God, who created the World.

This is, Sir, what I had to say to you concerning Miracles; not to exhaust the Matter, but only to shew the Possibility and Truth of those of Christ and his Apostles. I heartily pray God, that it may contribute to reclaim those who out of Ignorance or otherwise doubt of the Truth of the Christian Religion. I am, *&c.*

FINIS.

Books lately printed for Awnſham *and* John Churchill.

A Short Diſcourſe of the Knowledg of Chriſt Jeſus; to which are added ſome Paſſages in *the Reaſonableneſs of Chriſtianity*, &c. and its *Vindication*. With ſome Animadverſions on Mr. *Edwards*'s Reflections on the Reaſonableneſs of Chriſtianity; and on his Book entituled, *Socinianiſm Unmaſqued*. By *Samuel Bold*, Rector of *Steeple*, *Dorſet*. 8°.

Prince Arthur, an Heroick Poem in 10 Books. By *Richard Blackmore*, M. D. And Fellow of the College of Phyſicians in *London*.

Several Papers relating to Money, Intereſt, and Trade, *&c.* Writ upon ſeveral Occaſions, and publiſhed at different Times. By *John Locke*, Eſq. 8°.

Mr. *Talent*'s Chronological Tables; or a View of Univerſal Hiſtory, from the Creation, to the Year of Chriſt, 1695. Wherein the moſt memorable Perſons and Things in the known Kingdoms and Countries of the World, are ſet down in ſeveral Columns, by way of Synchroniſm, according to their proper Centuries and Years. In 16 Copper Plates.

Notitia Monaſtica; Or, a ſhort View of the Religious Houſes in *England* and *Wales*, &c. By *Thomas Tanner*, A. B. 8°.

The Reſurrection of the ſame Body aſſerted, *&c.* By *Hump. Hody*, D. D.

The Gentleman's Religion, with the Grounds and Reaſons of it. 12°.

The Reaſonableneſs of Chriſtianity as delivered in the Scriptures, *&c.* With a Vindication againſt Mr. *Edwards*'s Exceptions; by the ſame Hand. 8°.

An Abridgment of Mr. *Lock*'s Eſſay of Human Underſtanding. By Mr. *John Wynne*, of Jeſus College, *Oxford*. 8°.